

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

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NO NAME.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN IN WHITE," &c.

CHAPTER XI.

THE postmark and the handwriting on the address (admirably imitated from the original), warned Mrs. Lecount of the contents of the letter before she opened it.

After waiting a moment to compose herself, she read the announcement of her brother's lapse.

There was nothing in the handwriting, there was no expression in any part of the letter, which could suggest to her mind the faintest suspicion of foul play. Not the shadow of a doubt occurred to her that the summons to her brother's bedside was genuine. The hand that held the letter dropped heavily into her lap; she became pale, and old, and haggard, in a moment. Thoughts, far removed from her present aims and interests; remembrances that carried her back to other lands than England, to other times than the time of her life in service, prolonged their inner shadows to the surface, and showed the traces of their mysterious passage darkly on her face. The minutes followed each other; and still the servant below stairs waited vainly for the parlour bell. The minutes followed each other; and still she sat, tearless and quiet, dead to the present and the future, living in the past.

The entrance of the servant, uncalled, roused her. With a heavy sigh, the cold and secret woman folded the letter up again, and addressed herself to the interest and the duties of the passing time.

She decided the question of going or not going, to Zurich, after a very brief consideration of it. Before she had drawn her chair to the breakfast-table, she had resolved to go.

Admirably as Captain Wragge's stratagem had worked, it might have failed—unassisted by the occurrence of the morning—to achieve this result. The very accident against which it had been the captain's chief anxiety to guard—the accident which had just taken place in spite of him—was, of all the events that could have happened, the one event which falsified every previous calculation, by directly forwarding the main purpose of the conspiracy! If Mrs. Le-

count had not obtained the information of which she was in search, before the receipt of the letter from Zurich, the letter might have addressed her in vain. She would have hesitated, before deciding to leave England; and that hesitation might have proved fatal to the captain's scheme.

As it was, with the plain proofs in her possession—with the gown discovered in Magdalen's wardrobe; with the piece cut out of it, in her own pocket-book; and with the knowledge, obtained from Mrs. Wragge, of the very house in which the disguise had been put on—Mrs. Lecount had now at her command the means of warning Mr. Noel Vanstone, as she had never been able to warn him yet—or, in other words, the means of guarding against any dangerous tendencies towards reconciliation with the Bygraves, which might otherwise have entered his mind during her absence at Zurich. The only difficulty which now perplexed her, was the difficulty of deciding whether she should communicate with her master personally, or by writing, before her departure from England.

She looked again at the doctor's letter. The word "instantly," in the sentence which summoned her to her dying brother, was twice underlined. Admiral Bartram's house was at some distance from the railway; the time consumed in driving to St. Cruz, and driving back again, might be time fatally lost on the journey to Zurich. Although she would infinitely have preferred a personal interview with Mr. Noel Vanstone, there was no choice, on a matter of life and death, but to save the precious hours by writing to him.

After sending to secure a place at once in the early coach, she sat down to write to her master.

Her first thought was to tell him all that had happened at North Shingles that morning. On reflection, however, she rejected the idea. Once already (in copying the personal description from Miss Garth's letter) she had trusted her weapons in her master's hands, and Mr. Bygrave had contrived to turn them against her. She resolved this time to keep them strictly in her own possession. The secret of the missing fragment of the Alpaca dress was known to no living creature but herself; and, until her return to England, she determined to keep it to herself. The necessary impression might be produced on Mr. Noel Vanstone's mind without

venturing into details. She knew, by experience, the form of letter which might be trusted to produce an effect on him, and she now wrote it, in these words:

Dear Mr. Noel,—Sad news has reached me from Switzerland. My beloved brother is dying, and his medical attendant summons me instantly to Zurich. The serious necessity of availing myself of the earliest means of conveyance to the Continent, leaves me but one alternative. I must profit by the permission to leave England, if necessary, which you kindly granted to me at the beginning of my brother's illness; and I must avoid all delay, by going straight to London, instead of turning aside, as I should have liked, to see you first at St. Crux.

Painfully as I am affected by the family calamity which has fallen on me, I cannot let this opportunity pass without adverting to another subject, which seriously concerns your welfare, and in which (on that account) your old housekeeper feels the deepest interest.

I am going to surprise and shock you, Mr. Noel. **Pray** don't be agitated! pray compose yourself!

The impudent attempt to cheat you, which has happily opened your eyes to the true character of our neighbours at North Shingles, was not the only object which Mr. Bygrave had in forcing himself on your acquaintance. The infamous conspiracy with which you were threatened in London, has been in full progress against you, under Mr. Bygrave's direction, at Aldborough. Accident—I will tell you what accident when we meet—has put me in possession of information precious to your future security. I have discovered, to an absolute certainty, that the person calling herself Miss Bygrave, is no other than the woman who visited us in disguise at Vauxhall Walk.

I suspected this, from the first; but I had no evidence to support my suspicions: I had no means of combating the false impression produced on you. My hands, I thank Heaven, are tied no longer. I possess absolute proof of the assertion that I have just made—proof that your own eyes can see; proof that would satisfy you, if you were judge in a Court of Justice.

Perhaps, even yet, Mr. Noel, you will refuse to believe me? Be it so. Believe me or not, I have one last favour to ask, which your English sense of fair play will not deny me.

This melancholy journey of mine will keep me away from England for a fortnight, or, at most, for three weeks. You will oblige me—and you will certainly not sacrifice your own convenience and pleasure—by staying through that interval with your friends at St. Crux. If, before my return, some unexpected circumstance throws you once more into the company of the Bygraves; and if your natural kindness of heart inclines you to receive the excuses which they will, in that case, certainly address to you—place one trifling restraint on yourself, for your own sake, if not for mine. Suspend your flirtation with the young lady (I beg pardon of all other young ladies for calling her so!) until my return. If, when I come back, I fail to prove to you that Miss Bygrave is the woman who wore that disguise, and used those threatening words, in Vauxhall Walk, I will engage to leave your service at a day's notice; and I will atone for the sin of bearing false witness against my neighbour, by resigning every claim I have to your grateful remembrance, on your father's account as well as on your own. I make this engagement without reserves of

any kind; and I promise to abide by it—if my proofs fail—on the faith of a good Catholic, and the word of an honest woman. Your faithful servant,
VIRGINIE LECOUNT.

The closing sentences of this letter—as the housekeeper well knew when she wrote them—embodied the one appeal to Mr. Noel Vanstone, which could be certainly trusted to produce a deep and lasting effect. She might have staked her oath, her life, or her reputation on proving the assertion which she had made, and have failed to leave a permanent impression on his mind. But when she staked not only her position in his service, but her pecuniary claims on him as well, she at once absorbed the ruling passion of his life in expectation of the result. There was not a doubt of it, in the strongest of all his interests—the interest of saving his money—he would wait.

"Check-mate for Mr. Bygrave!" thought Mrs. Lecount, as she sealed and directed the letter. "The battle is over—the game is played out."

While Mrs. Lecount was providing for her master's future security at Sea View, events were in full progress at North Shingles.

As soon as Captain Wragge recovered his astonishment at the housekeeper's appearance on his own premises, he hurried into the house, and guided by his own forebodings of the disaster that had happened, made straight for his wife's room.

Never, in all her former experience, had poor Mrs. Wragge felt the full weight of the captain's indignation, as she felt it now. All the little intelligence she naturally possessed, vanished at once in the whirlwind of her husband's rage. The only plain facts which he could extract from her were two in number. In the first place, Magdalen's rash desertion of her post, proved to have no better reason to excuse it than Magdalen's incorrigible impatience: she had passed a sleepless night; she had risen feverish and wretched; and she had gone out, reckless of all consequences, to cool her burning head in the fresh air. In the second place, Mrs. Wragge had, on her own confession, seen Mrs. Lecount, had talked with Mrs. Lecount, and had ended by telling Mrs. Lecount the story of the ghost. Having made these discoveries, Captain Wragge wasted no more time in contending with his wife's terror and confusion. He withdrew at once to a window which commanded an uninterrupted prospect of Mr. Noel Vanstone's house; and there established himself, on the watch for events at Sea View, precisely as Mrs. Lecount had established herself, on the watch for events at North Shingles.

Not a word of comment on the disaster of the morning escaped him, when Magdalen returned, and found him at his post. His flow of language seemed at last to have run dry. "I told you what Mrs. Wragge would do," he said—"and Mrs. Wragge has done it." He sat unflinchingly at the window, with a patience

which Mrs. Lecount herself could not have surpassed. The one active proceeding in which he seemed to think it necessary to engage, was performed by deputy. He sent the servant to the inn to hire a chaise and a fast horse, and to say that he would call himself, before noon that day, and tell the ostler when the vehicle would be wanted. Not a sign of impatience escaped him, until the time drew near for the departure of the early coach. Then the captain's curly lips began to twitch with anxiety, and the captain's restless fingers beat the devil's tattoo unintermittingly on the window-pane.

The rumbling wheels were heard at last; the coach drew up at Sea View; and Captain Wragge's own observation informed him that one among the passengers who left Aldborough that morning, was—Mrs. Lecount.

The main uncertainty disposed of, a serious question—suggested by the events of the morning—still remained to be solved. Which was the destined end of Mrs. Lecount's journey—Zurich or St. Crux? That she would certainly inform her master of Mrs. Wragge's ghost story, and of every other disclosure in relation to names and places which might have escaped Mrs. Wragge's lips, was beyond all doubt. But of the two ways at her disposal of doing the mischief—either personally, or by letter—it was vitally important to the captain to know which she had chosen. If she had gone to the admiral's, no choice would be left him but to follow the coach, to catch the train by which she travelled, and outstrip her afterwards on the drive from the station in Essex to St. Crux. If, on the contrary, she had been contented with writing to her master, it would only be necessary to devise measures for intercepting the letter. The captain decided on going to the post-office, in the first place. Assuming that the housekeeper had written, she would not have left the letter at the mercy of the servant—she would have seen it safely in the letter-box before leaving Aldborough.

"Good morning," said the captain, cheerfully addressing the postmaster. "I am Mr. Bygrave, of North Shingles. I think you have a letter in the box, addressed to Mr. —?"

The postmaster was a short man, and consequently a man with a proper idea of his own importance. He solemnly checked Captain Wragge in full career.

"When a letter is once posted, sir," he said, "nobody out of the office has any business with it, until it reaches its address."

The captain was not a man to be daunted, even by a postmaster. A bright idea struck him. He took out his pocket-book, in which Admiral Bartram's address was written, and returned to the charge.

"Suppose a letter has been wrongly directed by mistake?" he began. "And suppose the writer wants to correct the error, after the letter is put in the box?"

"When a letter is once posted, sir," reiterated the impenetrable local authority, "nobody out

of the office touches it on any pretence whatever."

"Granted, with all my heart," persisted the captain. "I don't want to touch it—I only want to explain myself. A lady has posted a letter here, addressed to 'Noel Vanstone, Esq., Admiral Bartram's, St. Crux-in-the-Marsh, Essex.' She wrote in a great hurry, and she is not quite certain whether she added the name of the post-town, 'Ossory.' It is of the last importance that the delivery of the letter should not be delayed. What is to hinder your facilitating the post-office work, and obliging a lady, by adding the name of the post-town (if it happens to be left out), with your own hand? I put it to you as a zealous officer—what possible objection can there be to granting my request?"

The postmaster was compelled to acknowledge that there could be no objection—provided nothing but a necessary line was added to the address; provided nobody touched the letter but himself; and provided the precious time of the post-office was not suffered to run to waste. As there happened to be nothing particular to do at that moment, he would readily oblige the lady, at Mr. Bygrave's request.

Captain Wragge watched the postmaster's hands, as they sorted the letters in the box, with breathless eagerness. Was the letter there? Would the hands of the zealous public servant suddenly stop? Yes! They stopped, and picked a letter out from the rest.

"'Noel Vanstone, Esquire,' did you say?" asked the postmaster, keeping the letter in his own hand.

"'Noel Vanstone, Esquire,'" replied the captain, "'Admiral Bartram's, St. Crux-in-the-Marsh.'"

"Ossory, Essex," chimed in the postmaster, throwing the letter back into the box. "The lady has made no mistake, sir. The address is quite right."

Nothing but a timely consideration of the heavy debt he owed to appearances, prevented Captain Wragge from throwing his tall white hat up into the air, as soon as he found himself in the street once more. All further doubt was now at an end. Mrs. Lecount had written to her master—therefore Mrs. Lecount was on her way to Zurich!

With his head higher than ever, with the tails of his respectable frock-coat floating behind him in the breeze, with his bosom's native impudence sitting lightly on its throne—the captain strutted to the inn and called for the railway time-table. After making certain calculations (in black and white, as a matter of course), he ordered his chaise to be ready in an hour—so as to reach the railway in time for the second train running to London—with which there happened to be no communication from Aldborough by coach.

His next proceeding was of a far more serious kind; his next proceeding implied a terrible certainty of success. The day of the week was

Thursday. From the inn he went to the church; saw the clerk; and gave the necessary notice for a marriage by license, on the following Monday.

Bold as he was, his nerves were a little shaken by this last achievement; his hand trembled as it lifted the latch of the garden gate. He doctored his nerves with brandy-and-water, before he sent for Magdalen to inform her of the proceedings of the morning. Another outbreak might reasonably be expected, when she heard that the last irrevocable step had been taken, and that notice had been given of the wedding-day.

The captain's watch warned him to lose no time in emptying his glass. In a few minutes, he sent the necessary message up stairs. While waiting for Magdalen's appearance, he provided himself with certain materials which were now necessary to carry the conspiracy to its crowning point. In the first place, he wrote his assumed name (by no means in so fine a hand as usual) on a blank visiting card; and added, underneath, these words: "Not a moment is to be lost. I am waiting for you at the door—come down to me directly." His next proceeding was to take some half-dozen envelopes out of the case, and to direct them all alike to the following address: "Thomas Bygrave, Esq., Mus-sared's Hotel, Salisbury-street, Strand, London." After carefully placing the envelopes and the card in his breast-pocket, he shut up the desk. As he rose from the writing-table, Magdalen came into the room.

The captain took a moment to decide on the best method of opening the interview; and determined, in his own phrase, to dash at it. In two words, he told Magdalen what had happened; and informed her that Monday was to be her wedding-day.

He was prepared to quiet her if she burst into a frenzy of passion; to reason with her, if she begged for time; to sympathise with her if she melted into tears. To his inexpressible surprise, results falsified all his calculations. She heard him without uttering a word, without shedding a tear. When he had done, she dropped into a chair. Her large grey eyes stared at him vacantly. In one mysterious instant, all her beauty left her; her face stiffened awfully, like the face of a corpse. For the first time in the captain's experience of her, fear—all-mastering fear—had taken possession of her, body and soul.

"You are not flinching?" he said, trying to rouse her. "Surely you are not flinching at the last moment?"

No light of intelligence came into her eyes; no change passed over her face. But she heard him—for she moved a little in the chair, and slowly shook her head.

"You planned this marriage of your own free will," pursued the captain, with the furtive look and the faltering voice of a man ill at ease. "It was your own idea—not mine. I won't have the responsibility laid on my shoulders—no! not for twice two hundred pounds. If your resolution fails you; if you think better of it —?"

He stopped. Her face was changing; her lips were moving at last. She slowly raised her left hand, with the fingers outspread—she looked at it, as if it was a hand that was strange to her—she counted the days on it, the days before the marriage.

"Friday, one," she whispered to herself; "Saturday, two; Sunday, three; Monday——" Her hands dropped into her lap; her face stiffened again. The deadly fear fastened its paralysing hold on her once more; and the next words died away on her lips.

Captain Wragge took out his handkerchief, and wiped his forehead.

"Damn the two hundred pounds!" he said. "Two thousand wouldn't pay me for this!"

He went back to the writing-table, took the envelopes which he had addressed to himself out of his pocket, and returned to the chair in which she was sitting, with the envelopes in his hand.

"Rouse yourself," he said; "I have a last word to say to you. Can you listen?"

She struggled, and roused herself—a faint tinge of colour stole over her white cheeks—she bowed her head.

"Look at these," pursued Captain Wragge, holding up the envelopes. "If I turn these to the use for which they have been written, Mrs. Lecount's master will never receive Mrs. Lecount's letter. If I tear them up, he will know by to-morrow's post that you are the woman who visited him in Vauxhall Walk. Say the word! Shall I tear the envelopes up, or shall I put them back in my pocket?"

There was a pause of dead silence. The murmur of the summer waves on the shingle of the beach, and the voices of the summer idlers on the parade, floated through the open window, and filled the empty stillness of the room.

She raised her head; she lifted her hand and pointed steadily to the envelopes.

"Put them back," she said.

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"I mean it."

As she gave that answer, there was a sound of wheels on the road outside.

"You hear those wheels?" said Captain Wragge.

"I hear them."

"You see the chaise?" said the captain, pointing through the window, as the chaise which had been ordered from the inn made its appearance at the garden gate.

"I see it."

"And, of your own free will, you tell me to go?"

"Yes. Go!"

Without another word, he left her. The servant was waiting at the door with his travelling-bag. "Miss Bygrave is not well," he said. "Tell your mistress to go to her in the parlour."

He stepped into the gig, and started on the first stage of the journey to St. Crux.

CHAPTER XII.

TOWARDS three o'clock, that afternoon, Captain Wragge stopped at the nearest station to Ossory which the railway passed in its course through Essex. Inquiries made on the spot, informed him that he might drive to St. Crux, remain there for a quarter of an hour, and return to the station in time for an evening train to London. In ten minutes more, the captain was on the road again, driving rapidly in the direction of the coast.

After proceeding some miles on the highway, the carriage turned off, and the coachman involved himself in an intricate network of cross-roads.

"Are we far from St. Crux?" asked the captain, growing impatient, after mile on mile had been passed, without a sign of reaching the journey's end.

"You'll see the house, sir, at the next turn in the road," said the man.

The next turn in the road brought them within view of the open country again. Ahead of the carriage, Captain Wragge saw a long dark line against the sky—the line of the sea-wall which protects the low coast of Essex from inundation. The flat intermediate country was intersected by a labyrinth of tidal streams, winding up from the invisible sea in strange fantastic curves—rivers at high water, and channels of mud at low. On his right hand was a quaint little village, mostly composed of wooden houses, straggling down to the brink of one of the tidal streams. On his left hand, farther away, rose the gloomy ruins of an Abbey, with a long, low, desolate pile of building, of vast extent and great age, attached to it. One of the streams from the sea (called in Essex, "backwaters") curled almost entirely round the house. Another, from an opposite quarter, appeared to run straight through the grounds, and to separate one side of the shapeless mass of buildings, which was in moderate repair, from another, which was little better than a ruin. Bridges of wood, and bridges of brick, crossed the stream, and gave access to the house from all points of the compass. No human creature appeared in the neighbourhood, and no sound was heard but the hoarse barking of a house-dog from an invisible courtyard.

"Which door shall I drive to, sir?" asked the coachman. "The front, or the back?"

"The back," said Captain Wragge, feeling that the less notice he attracted in his present position, the safer that position might be.

The carriage twice crossed the stream before the coachman made his way through the grounds into a dreary enclosure of stone. At an open door on the inhabited side of the place, sat a weather-beaten old man-servant, busily at work on a half-finished model of a ship. He rose and came to the carriage door, lifting up his spectacles on his forehead, and looking disconcerted at the appearance of a stranger.

"Is Mr. Noel Vanstone staying here?" asked Captain Wragge.

"Yes, sir," replied the old man. "Mr. Noel came yesterday."

"Take that card to Mr. Vanstone, if you please," said the captain; "and say I am waiting here to see him."

In a few minutes, Mr. Noel Vanstone made his appearance breathless and eager; absorbed in anxiety for news from Aldborough. Captain Wragge opened the carriage door, seized his outstretched hand, and pulled him in without ceremony.

"Your housekeeper has gone," whispered the captain, "and you are to be married on Monday. Don't agitate yourself, and don't express your feelings—there isn't time for it. Get the first active servant you can find in the house, to pack your bag in ten minutes—take leave of the admiral—and come back at once with me to the London train."

Mr. Noel Vanstone faintly attempted to ask a question. The captain declined to hear it.

"As much talk as you like on the road," he said. "Time is too precious for talking here. How do we know Lecount may not think better of it? How do we know she may not turn back, before she gets to Zurich?"

That startling consideration terrified Mr. Noel Vanstone into instant submission.

"What shall I say to the admiral!" he asked, helplessly.

"Tell him you are going to be married, to be sure! What does it matter, now Lecount's back is turned? If he wonders you didn't tell him before, say it's a runaway match, and the bride is waiting for you. Stop! Any letters addressed to you, in your absence, will be sent to this place, of course? Give the admiral these envelopes, and tell him to forward your letters under cover to me. I am an old customer at the hotel we are going to; and if we find the place full, the landlord may be depended on to take care of any letters with my name on them. A safe address in London for your correspondence, may be of the greatest importance. How do we know Lecount may not write to you on her way to Zurich?"

"What a head you have got," cried Mr. Noel Vanstone, eagerly taking the envelopes. "You think of everything."

He left the carriage in high excitement, and ran back into the house. In ten minutes more Captain Wragge had him in safe custody, and the horses started on their return journey.

The travellers reached London in good time that evening, and found accommodation at the hotel.

Knowing the restless, inquisitive nature of the man he had to deal with, Captain Wragge had anticipated some little difficulty and embarrassment in meeting the questions which Mr. Noel Vanstone might put to him on the way to London. To his great relief, a startling domestic dis-

covery absorbed his travelling companion's whole attention at the outset of the journey. By some extraordinary oversight, Miss Bygrave had been left, on the eve of her marriage, unprovided with a maid! Mr. Noel Vanstone declared that he would take the whole responsibility of correcting this deficiency in the arrangements, on his own shoulders; he would not trouble Mr. Bygrave to give him any assistance; he would confer, when they got to their journey's end, with the landlady of the hotel, and would examine the candidates for the vacant office himself. All the way to London, he returned again and again to the same subject; all the evening, at the hotel, he was in and out of the landlady's sitting-room, until he fairly obliged her to lock the door. In every other proceeding which related to his marriage, he had been kept in the background; he had been compelled to follow in the footsteps of his ingenious friend. In the matter of the lady's maid he claimed his fitting position at last—he followed nobody; he took the lead!

The forenoon of the next day was devoted to obtaining the license—the personal distinction of making the declaration on oath being eagerly accepted by Mr. Noel Vanstone, who swore, in perfect good faith (on information previously obtained from the captain), that the lady was of age. The document procured, the bridegroom returned to examine the characters and qualifications of the women-servants out of place, whom the landlady had engaged to summon to the hotel—while Captain Wragge turned his steps, "on business personal to himself," towards the residence of a friend in a distant quarter of London.

The captain's friend was connected with the law, and the captain's business was of a twofold nature. His first object was to inform himself of the legal bearings of the approaching marriage on the future of the husband and the wife. His second object was to provide, beforehand, for destroying all traces of the destination to which he might betake himself, when he left Aldborough on the wedding-day. Having reached his end successfully, in both these cases, he returned to the hotel, and found Mr. Noel Vanstone nursing his offended dignity in the landlady's sitting-room. Three ladies'-maids had appeared to pass their examination, and had all, on coming to the question of wages, impudently declined accepting the place. A fourth candidate was expected to present herself on the next day; and, until she made her appearance, Mr. Noel Vanstone positively declined removing from the metropolis. Captain Wragge showed his annoyance openly at the unnecessary delay thus occasioned in the return to Aldborough, but without producing any effect. Mr. Noel Vanstone shook his obstinate little head, and solemnly refused to trifle with his responsibilities.

The first event which occurred on Saturday morning, was the arrival of Mrs. Lecount's letter to her master, enclosed in one of the envelopes which the captain had addressed to himself.

He received it (by previous arrangement with the waiter) in his bedroom—read it with the closest attention—and put it away carefully in his pocket-book. The letter was ominous of serious events to come, when the housekeeper returned to England; and it was due to Magdalen—who was the person threatened—to place the warning of danger in her own possession.

Later in the day the fourth candidate appeared for the maid's situation—a young woman of small expectations and subdued manners, who looked (as the landlady remarked) like a person conversant with misfortunes. She passed the ordeal of examination successfully, and accepted the wages offered without a murmur. The engagement having been ratified on both sides, fresh delays ensued, of which Mr. Noel Vanstone was once more the cause. He had not yet made up his mind whether he would, or would not, give more than a guinea for the wedding-ring; and he wasted the rest of the day to such disastrous purpose in one jeweller's shop after another, that he and the captain, and the new lady's-maid (who travelled with them), were barely in time to catch the last train from London that evening.

It was late at night when they left the railway at the nearest station to Aldborough. Captain Wragge had been strangely silent all through the journey. His mind was ill at ease. He had left Magdalen, under very critical circumstances, with no fit person to control her; and he was wholly ignorant of the progress of events, in his absence, at North Shingles.

THIRTEEN PRINCES OF WALES.

On Sunday, the ninth of November, his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will arrive at the mature age of twenty-one, and will complete the three times seven which fulfil the mystical number of the years of discretion. A few months afterwards, he will take to wife a German-Danish princess.

There are some who believe that for man generally the number of the years of discretion has been wrongly settled by the mystical arithmetic; that three times three is the right multiple of seven; and that man properly comes of age when he is sixty-three. In the number sixty-three, observe the six and three, which, when added together, make nine, the complete number of the muses, but when subtracted one from the other, will make three, the number of the graces. Out of twenty-one you can get by addition only three, the number of the graces; you cannot get the muses. Whether you add, subtract, multiply, or divide, for them, they will not come. For are not the graces led by youth, and the muses by experience? Inheritance of property on coming of age would obviously be preferable under the rule of nine times seven. For while it would oblige men whose ancestors have thriven, to live by their own energy in years when a man ought to do so, it would secure them

a comfortable provision for the days of age, in case they failed, or a well-timed addition to the fruits of their labour.

The coming of age questions are high mysteries. Do all men attain years of discretion at the same moment in their lives—as the clock strikes twelve on the night preceding their twenty-second birthday—twenty-second because they are 0 years old on their first—does nobody ever between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five grow less discreet every day? Diversity of character, say the lawyers, can have nothing to do with it. Twenty-one is the age at which every man ought to be discreet. Prodigious truth! Bilkins at twenty-one publishes rhapsodies of verse; Dilkins, at twenty-one converts all silver that he touches into pastry; Filkins, at twenty-one, crams for examination, and gulps information down in undigested lumps; but they are all equally patterns of Blackstonian discretion.

He is the thirteenth English Prince of Wales who comes of age this year, on Sunday, the ninth of November. Of his predecessors, only four held the title when they came of age, so this is only the fifth of such coming-of-ages known to English history. Of the four who thus came of age as Princes of Wales, three came to the throne. Four of the princes married, and of these only one made a Princess of Wales a queen. May the omen be absent from this celebration; for all England joins the present prince in wishing that it may be forty years and more before he can be king.

In the fourteenth century, Edward the Black Prince, first Prince of Wales, died, aged forty-six, in the lifetime of his father. In him, England saw the first celebration of a marriage of a Prince of Wales—the genuine love-match celebrated five hundred and one years ago with the bright hearty and merry countess, his cousin Joan, the Fair Maid of Kent, daughter and heiress of the Earl of Kent, whom Mortimer had put to death.

Edward the Third died so soon after his eldest son, that Richard, his eleven-year-old grandson and successor, never took his brother's title of Prince of Wales. Henry the Fourth of Lancaster, having seized the throne, conferred next on his eldest son—Falstaff's sweet Hal—the rank of Prince of Wales, the second of the name. Hal became king before he was of age, and married as a king, not while a prince. His son, Henry the Sixth, was proclaimed king while yet in his swaddling-clothes, only nine months old, and he was never Prince of Wales. Wars of the roses preceded the accession of Edward the Fourth, who had not been a Prince of Wales. The third of the Princes of Wales was Edward the Fifth, who began to reign at the age of thirteen, and in the days of whose principedom there was for himself neither coming of age nor marriage. Richard the Third, of course, never was Prince of Wales, but the title was given by him to his son Edward, who died in infancy. That was the fourth prince; the fifth was

Arthur, son of King Henry the Seventh. This Prince of Wales did not survive to years of discretion, nor did he live to attain the throne, but he was the second Prince of Wales who married. At fifteen years of age, he became the husband of the Spanish Infanta, Katherine of Aragon. There was great festival in London. Five months afterwards, the boy was dead. His brother Henry, then aged twelve, succeeded him as Prince of Wales; and it was arranged for him that when he attained the age of fifteen, he should succeed, by marriage, to his brother's widow. He did not marry her until a few weeks after attaining the throne, at the age of eighteen: so there was neither coming of age nor wedding when Henry the Eighth was Prince of Wales, and he was the fifth who bore the title.

Henry's son, Edward the Sixth, came as a boy to the throne, and is said never to have been created Prince of Wales. Then followed Mary, Elizabeth, and James the First, whose son Henry (the sixth Prince of Wales) died before coming of age, and while his probable marriage was but matter of discussion. His brother Charles was the seventh of this broken line of princes. He came of age while Prince of Wales, and signed as prince the marriage contract with Henrietta Maria, renewing his signature after he had become king, at the age of twenty-five. He was Charles the First before she actually came to him as wife.

The next Prince of Wales was detained from the throne by the Commonwealth; when he came of age he had just been crowned by the Scots at Secone, and was near the end of his vain struggle against Cromwell. He became king at thirty, and it was as king that he married Catharine of Portugal.

His brother, James the Second, who succeeded him, of course had not been Prince of Wales, nor was his infant son, nor was William of the Revolution, nor was Queen Anne's one surviving son William, named Duke of Gloucester: after whose death the Act of Settlement was passed, which in due time made of George the First an English king.

Thus, after the time of the Commonwealth, we have no formally created Prince of Wales until the reign of George the First, when his son, who became George the Second, received that rank, being more than thirty years of age before he held it, when he had been already married for ten years. So in the days also of his principedom there was neither coming of age nor marriage.

The next prince, the tenth in the list, was Frederick, the eldest son of George the Second. Frederick first came to England after his father's accession, and his own creation as Prince of Wales, when he was already just of age. His coming of age, therefore, was no matter of public interest, but there was celebration in abundance of his marriage, eight or nine years later, with the Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha. Frederick

died before his father; and his son by this marriage, afterwards George the Third, was the next—the eleventh—Prince of Wales, who became king at the age of eighteen. In his principedom, also, there was no coming of age nor marriage.

The next and the last of the departed princes of this rank was he who became George the Fourth. As prince he came of age, and as prince, also, he married—twice. He was first married to Mrs. Fitzherbert, and afterwards to Caroline of Brunswick. She was the only Princess of Wales—unless we give that title, by right of a signed but unfulfilled contract of marriage, to Henrietta Maria, whose husband attained to the throne.

Clearly there can be no good precedent of English rejoicings at the coming of age of a Prince of Wales. For, the only precedents are to be found in the troubled youth of Charles the First, in Charles the Second's days of exile, in the coming of age of Frederick, the eldest son of George the Second—which took place at about the time of his arrival in this country as Prince of Wales, just after the accession of a father jealous of his son—and in the days of Prince George, who became George the Fourth. This prince furnishes, in fact, in the whole course of our history the solitary precedent of anything whatever having been done publicly to meet the occasion. He came of age on the twelfth of August, seventeen 'eighty-three: on which day the king and queen received the compliments of the nobility. Early in the year, the king's message had been conveyed to both Houses of Parliament for the prince's separate establishment, and a hundred thousand pounds were voted for that purpose. The actual day of the coming of age was celebrated only by the festivity of private bodies of friends; the public celebration was deferred for eight months, until the twenty-first of April in the ensuing year, and then we do not find that anything was made of it. The only public ceremony was the introduction of the prince to parliament, on the eleventh of November—three months after the coming of age. Having been made a knight of the Garter, he entered the House of Lords in his collar and robes, introduced by a ceremonious procession, his coronet carried before him on a crimson velvet cushion, and he himself carrying his writ of summons, supported by his uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, and the Dukes of Richmond and Portland. The writ and patent as Prince of Wales having been delivered with due ceremony, his royal highness was conducted to his chair on the right hand of the throne, whence his majesty, who was there seated, delivered a speech and retired. The prince then took the oath of allegiance and supremacy, and made and subscribed the oath of abjuration. Ten days later, the Prince of Wales was, by his majesty's command, introduced into the privy council, where he took his place at the upper end of the board, at his majesty's right. At her majesty's right hand—in council

and out of it—may the place of the prince who is now coming of age, be true and strong until his hair grows grey!

BALLOONING SPIDERS.

WE have already treated of spiders which tunnel the earth, and spiders which skate upon the water,* and will now discourse briefly respecting spiders which make their way through the air. The authors of our best summaries of comparative anatomy, such as Owen or Siebold, say nothing whatever in reference to the instruments by which the aerial transport of the spider is effected. Not merely do spiders run upon the earth and grass, climb upon the trees, and skate upon the lightest layer of the water globules; they also dive into the water. They burrow into the earth, and they move about in the air, and how they do these things are puzzles baffling still the curiosity of naturalists.

Mr. Charles Darwin, as naturalist of the *Beagle*, made many curious observations on spiders, and saw such strange things done by them, that he imagines they have some unknown power of making themselves wings whenever they feel the need of them. The very curious observations of M. Virey seem to prove, Mr. Darwin thinks, that small spiders in an atmosphere perfectly tranquil and without the aid of any web, have the power of darting through the air. By means of a rapid vibration of their feet they walk the air. On several occasions, when the *Beagle* was within the mouth of the Plata, the rigging was coated with the web of the gossamer spider. On the first of November, 1833, the weather having been fine and clear, the morning air was full of patches of the flocculent web, as on an autumnal day in England. The ship was sixty miles distant from the land in the direction of a steady though light breeze. Vast numbers of a spider about one-tenth of an inch in length, and of a dusky red colour, were attached to the webs. There must have been some thousands on the ship. The little spider when first coming in contact with the rigging, was always seated on a single thread, and not on the flocculent mass produced apparently by the entanglement of single threads. The spiders were all of one species, but of both sexes, and were accompanied by their young ones, which were distinguishable by their smaller size and more dusky colour. This little aeronaut, as soon as he arrived on board, ran about very actively, letting himself fall and mounting up again and making a small but very irregular mesh in the corners between the ropes. It could run with ease on the surface of the water. When disturbed it lifted up its fore-legs in the attitude of attention. On first boarding the ship, these spiders seemed very thirsty, and, with their lower jaws pushed out, drank water eagerly. Mr. Darwin fancies this was because they had passed through a dry and rarefied atmosphere; but we have kept and fed spiders, and we know that they are thirsty animals which enjoy a few drops of water every day. While watching some

* In Volume the Sixth, pages 351 and 369.

that were suspended by a single thread, he several times observed that the slightest breath of air bore them away in a horizontal line out of sight. Mr. Darwin repeatedly saw this kind of spider, having crawled up to an eminence, elevate its abdomen, send forth a thread, and then sail away with unaccountable rapidity. He thought, but he is not sure, that, before starting, the spider connected its legs together with the most delicate threads. One day when at Santa Fé, a spider about three-tenths of an inch in length, resembling a citigrade, and quite different therefore from the gossamer spider, while standing upon the summit of a post, darted forth three or four threads from its spinners. These glittering in the sunshine, might be compared to rays of light; they were not, however, straight, but in undulations, like a film of silk blown by the wind. They were more than a yard in length, and diverged in an ascending direction. The spider then suddenly let go its hold, and was quickly borne out of sight. The day was hot and calm, but the atmosphere can never be so tranquil as not to affect a vane so delicate as the thread of a spider's web. The effect of a current of heated air is evident when we look either at the shadow of an object cast on a bank, or over a level plain at a distant landmark, and this current would probably be sufficient to carry with it so light an object as the little spider with its thread.

The habit of sailing through the air is probably as characteristic of certain species as that of diving is of the silvery spider of the ponds. Upon the whole, Mr. Charles Darwin deems it probable that these tiny aeronauts do tie their feet with fine lines forming artificial wings, and "regrets he did not determine the point with accuracy, for it would be curious if a spider should be able to take flight by the aid of temporary wings." According to Mr. Blackwell (in the part of his work on British and Irish Spiders published last year by the Ray Society), if we have understood that gentleman correctly, these temporary wings made by the spiders have been described to be threads of viscous matter spread out into a sort of ribbon, serving as a sail or float for the tiny aerial voyagers.

Mr. Blackwell denies that spiders can dart lines from their spinners. He emphatically says they are utterly incapable of it. Many intelligent naturalists, he continues, maintain the opinion that spiders can forcibly propel or dart out lines from the spinners; but when placed on twigs, set apart in glass vessels with perpendicular sides, containing water enough to immerse their base completely, all the efforts they make to escape uniformly prove unavailing in a still atmosphere. However, should the individual thus insulated be exposed to a current of air, either naturally or artificially produced, the abdomen is immediately turned in the direction of the breeze, and the viscid secretion being carried out in a line by the current, it becomes connected with some object in the vicinity and en-

ables them to regain their liberty. When the air is undisturbed they cannot, but in an inhabited room they can, perform this operation without difficulty, the air being agitated.

Such is the decided deliverance of Mr. Blackwell; but we are compelled to say that we have performed the experiment he suggests, and obtained exactly contrary results. Many years ago we collected all the spiders we could find in the old castle of Ellon, Aberdeenshire, and put them on the bottoms of up-turned teacups, placed in saucers full of water. Most of the spiders did precisely what Mr. Blackwell describes, and showed themselves incapable of escaping from their insulated elevation, without the aid of a current; but one individual astonished us. He put out a thread in a straight horizontal line, a thread some five or six inches long, and slowly turning his abdomen in all directions, made the thread box the compass, as the sailors say. We were too young, too ignorant, and too far from books, to ascertain the species to which this individual belonged. But it proves that there are spiders which can do something more than put forth filaments upon the currents of the air, for it proves that they can stiffen their threads for special purposes.

Until the other day we knew of no testimony corroboratory of these observations, but we find them confirmed by other observers, and by authorities no less illustrious than Latreille and Lister. In the edition of Cuvier's *Animal Kingdom*, published in English in 1833, Latreille says: "Lister has asserted, that the spiders ejaculate and dart out their threads in the same manner as the porcupines shoot out their quills, with this difference, that the latter weapons, according to the popular opinion, are detached from the body, while in the spider these threads, though pushed to a distance, remain attached to the animal. This feat has been considered impossible. Nevertheless, we have seen threads issuing from the nipples of some crab spiders (*Thomis*) directed in a right line, and forming, as it were, movable radii when the animal moved circularly."

By far the most extraordinary statements respecting the faculty possessed by certain spiders of darting forth threads, are to be found in a work entitled *Experimental Researches*, published by a Mr. John Murray, a fellow of the Antiquarian, Linnean, Horticultural, Geological, Wernerian, and Meteorological Societies. The ascent of the spider, this writer believes, will be found connected with the meteorology of the atmosphere, and the observation of its curious habits will lead to some useful practical results. The oil of a particular lamp in the church of St. Eustace at Paris being consumed, and the lamp extinguished every morning, the sexton watched, sitting up several nights, and at last saw a spider of enormous size descend the chain or cord and drink up all the oil. A spider of immense size was detected, also feeding on the oil of a lamp, in the cathedral of Milan. When taken and weighed, this spider is said to have

weighed four pounds! No wonder it was sent to the Imperial Museum at Vienna!

From his own observations on the spider which he calls *Aranea aëronautica*, Mr. Murray suggests that it may be used as a barometer. If the weather be likely to become rainy, windy, or the like, the spider fixes the terminating threads by which the entire web is suspended, unusually short, and in this state awaits the impending change. On the other hand, if these threads be long the weather will be proportionally severe for a week or more. If the spiders be completely inactive, rain will likely follow, but if during the prevalence of rain their wonted activity be resumed, this rain may be considered as of short duration, and to be quickly followed by fair and constant weather. Spiders make alterations in their webs every twenty-four hours, and if these changes be observed between six and seven o'clock in the evening they indicate a clear and pleasant night.

Swammerdam and De Geer ridiculed the notion of spiders flying; but Dr. Martin Lister called a species of spider which he discovered and described, on account of its powers of flight, "the bird." For our part, we believe that when scientific men understand thoroughly the aerial locomotion of spiders, mechanical men will not be far from solving the problem of aërostation. Man is a wingless biped, who is trying to travel through the air, and he may get useful hints from a knowledge of how the wingless octopods do it. Dr. Hulse appears to have been the first who observed that spiders could dart their threads into the air. Dr. Martin Lister on several occasions saw his bird-spider pulling in its long thread with its fore-feet, forming thus a ball or air-balloon of flake. One day, when the air was full of these spider-balloons, he found them still above him, although he had mounted to the top of the highest steeple of York Minster. They can squirt out their threads with remarkable force. These faculties are common to several species of spiders. Of one species he says it is an excellent rope-dancer, wonderfully delighted with darting its threads, ascending and descending and sailing in the air, balancing itself by closing its legs together, and promoting and directing its course as if nature had furnished it with wings or oars.

John Hunter denies that spiders have air-cells, or anything resembling the air-sacks by which fishes regulate their specific gravity; and he would be a narrow-minded physiologist who should forget that Nature uses a great variety of instruments to work her ends. But the fact is they do it; and the puzzle is how they do it? Messrs. Kirby and Spence use the word "chariot," and ask what occasions the spiders to mount their chariots and seek the clouds? But the word is used without warrant, for no one professes ever to have seen anything like a spider-chariot. There are swimmers who send up kites, and then float considerable distances, drawn by the breeze upon the surface of the summer sea. May not certain spiders have a

similar contrivance? Certain tiny black and grey spiders, which in June last alighted on our coat-sleeve and escaped from our fingers, first let themselves fall some six or eight inches suspended by a thread, and then rose till the line was on a level with the finger, when they loosened the thread from the finger and floated away horizontally upon the breeze: as if a man who could not swim were to uncoil a string or chain of bladders, and then unhooking it from its holdfast, were to float away upon the swiftly-flowing tide. But different species have different ways. We have seen cobwebs round like balloons, or funnel-shaped like parachutes, descending from the skies and falling upon the stubble-fields. On examining these collapsed balloons or parachutes, we have found a small red spider within.

The range of our vision up into the blue is very limited, and we know very little as yet in reference to what is going on there. On the 19th of July, 1822, the anniversary of the royal coronation, the yeomanry were drawn up in the market-place at Kidderminster and fired a salute, which brought down a shower of very many aerial spiders. The explosions of gunpowder had made the currents of air on which the spiders floated, too light to bear their weight.

Mr. John Murray says he put an air-spider into water at the temperature of ninety-four degrees Fahrenheit, and after remaining at the bottom, sometimes at rest and sometimes active, it projected a thread upward and wound itself, sailor-like, resting occasionally, to the surface. One of these spiders by candlelight darted instantaneously a thread to the ceiling of a room eight feet high, at an angle of about eighty degrees with the horizon. "During my stay at Chester, while I was experimenting with an aëronautic spider," says Mr. Murray, in another place, "during a warm day and brilliant sunshine about noon; my room door was ajar, and the insect in the act of propelling its threads in all directions, suddenly darted one towards the door, in the direction of the influx-current, perfectly horizontal, and in length ten feet. The angle of vision being particularly favourable I observed an extraordinary aura or atmosphere round the thread which I cannot doubt was electric." "The point of a gold wire was brought near to the vertical thread in one experiment above the spider in the act of escaping to the ceiling of the room. It evidently disconcerted its progress, and the animal seemed agitated and unable to ascend. On removing the point the insect soon made its escape." On the 4th of August, 1822, at three P.M., thermometer sixty-six degrees, the ascent was slow and beautiful, the little aëronaut rising regularly in the vertical plane. It vanished at a height of at least thirty feet. The friction sustained in its sudden propulsion through the air, would alone invest the thread with electricity; for a fibre of very fine spun glass suddenly drawn upward, has been seen to remain vertical and found to be electrical. Mr. John Murray mentions Mr. T.

Hopkins, of Kidderminster, and Mr. T. Brown, of Cirencester, as persons to whom, among several others, he repeatedly exhibited the phenomena he describes. Moreover, his statements will seem less improbable if we remember the butterfly trick of the Japanese conjurors. The conjuror twists a bit of paper into the form of a butterfly, which by means of a couple of fans he sends flitting about in a room from flower to flower. He makes a second butterfly, and it is seen playing with the other; and then he lets loose a flock of butterflies, which, after flying about and playing with each other, finally settle upon the flowers.

A summary of results which appear to be proven:—Spiders can dart out stiff threads without the aid of currents of air. There are spiders which can put forth a stiff thread in a horizontal direction, and box the compass with it; there are certain species of spiders which can sail upon the breezes by means of a float of filaments. And there are spiders which travel in the skies, by means of balloons, which they make of silk, and inflate, and regulate, and direct.

DUGGAN AND HIS GANG.

THOUGH it is now sixty years ago, there are travellers yet alive who, going by stage-coach from Cork to Tralee, have seen the eight skulls that were stuck on spikes on the roof of the market-house in the town of Macroom, in the barony of Muskerry.

People did not like to talk about the skulls. When questioned, the country people said "they were the murderers of Colonel Hutchinson;" but no more could be got out of them. The skulls were a source of disgust and horror to the inhabitants of Macroom, and to all the country round. They had not been subjected to any previous process, as was usually the case with the horrible remains of traitors' heads and members, ordered to be exposed. These heads had been put over the market-house at Macroom just as they were struck from the bodies to which they belonged.

Above one of the heads there was nailed a hand, severed at the wrist, and the sight of the half-bleached skulls was hideous. They cowed the people, and struck more fear of the law into their hearts than as many regiments of dragoons. That part of the country, for many years after the event that gave rise to this spectacle, was the most peaceable district in Ireland. The fate of the "murderers of Mr. Hutchinson" was a very effective terror to evil-doers. But who were they? and what was the story? Here it is: for though people would not tell it, it is on record in the criminal trials.

Mr. Hutchinson was an amiable and worthy man, who lived at a house called Codrum, about a mile out of the market-town of Macroom. It stood in its own plantation, on a rising ground, with a lawn before it, dotted

with ornamental trees, and adorned with fair beds of flowers. Colonel Hutchinson was a man of property; he belonged to what was called a "new family," but he was much respected by the neighbouring gentry; the poor people were fond of him, for he was an excellent and charitable man. In 1782, he had held a commission in the Irish Volunteers, and when they were disbanded the title of "colonel" was allowed to most of the officers. Colonel Hutchinson's sister resided with him, and he had one man-servant. Although he was popular, he was nevertheless an active magistrate, and had been so, in the famous year '98; but no harm had ever been done to him or his property. It was his habit to sit up reading late at night, and the light in his bedroom could be seen at all hours. He was known to have much valuable property in the house; but he took no extra precaution.

One morning, early in the summer of the year 1800, the neighbourhood was thrown into commotion by the report that Colonel Hutchinson had been murdered in the night. Some labourers passing to their work saw the large kitchen window, in the front of the house, completely smashed. Going up to learn what had happened, they found the shutter broken in, the front door open, and the body of Colonel Hutchinson lying dead and stiff at the foot of the stairs, with a wound through his heart. Shot dead, as was supposed.

None of the inmates could give any account of the matter. Miss Hutchinson could only say that she had been awakened by the noise of the kitchen window being smashed in, and the sound of several persons rushing into the house. In her fright she left her bed and hid behind a large press, up-stairs in a garret, and had not ventured out till long after all was quiet. Reen, the man-servant, stammered and looked exceedingly guilty; but could give no information. He declared he was very deaf, and had not heard anything whatever during the night; that he had been, besides, fast asleep. Of course, he was an object of suspicion, and was taken into custody; but nothing could be got out of him. All the neighbouring gentry belonged to the yeomanry corps—Catholics as well as Protestants—and they bound themselves by an oath not to rest until the murderers were discovered.

A reward of three hundred pounds was offered for any information that could lead to their detection. One remarkable thing was, that, although a handsome looking-glass had been broken, and some furniture pulled about, nothing had been stolen. Suspicion at last fell on a man named Malachi Duggan. He was a farmer of the better class; superior to the common peasantry in education and intelligence, as well as in position. He bore, however, a very bad character. In appearance he was the type of a ruffian; of gigantic stature, and strong in proportion; his countenance was brutal and ferocious, with a dash of cunning which made it more repulsive; oddly enough, he was in great request in the

neighbourhood as—a juryman! People who had a cause in court used to bribe him to be on the jury, and if he were satisfied with the amount, he, possibly, also bribed the summoning officer. He then always either tired out, or bullied, or over-persuaded, his fellow-jurors. When the officers went to his house, accompanied by several magistrates, they found him at home. He made no attempt to escape, but treated the charge lightly. One of the magistrates advised him to give orders about his farm, as he would be away a long time.

"Sure it will not be more than a couple of days, at furthest," said he.

"It will be more than two days, or two weeks, or two years," said the magistrate.

Malachi shrugged his shoulders, ordered his nag to be saddled, and he cut a long willow switch for the purpose of urging on his horse. He did not seem to attend to anything passing round him, but rode on in silence, with the end of this rod in his mouth. He continued to bite it, and when he and his escort arrived at Macroom, a distance of only three miles, the willow switch was bitten to within an inch of the end. He had been considering. He offered to turn informer if he might be assured of the three hundred pounds offered for reward. His offer was accepted, and Malachi Duggan stated that on the night in question fourteen men, under his orders, assembled and went in a body to attack Codrum, with the intention of plundering whatever they could carry off, but without any design to harm Colonel Hutchinson. Colonel Hutchinson was sitting up reading as usual, and on hearing the noise of the window smashed and the shutter broken in, he immediately came down stairs to see what was the matter. He found the hall filled with men, some of whom were armed; amongst them he saw his own gamekeeper, named MacCarthy, and incautiously exclaimed:

"Are you here, MacCarthy?"

Malachi Duggan, the captain of the gang, at once called out:

"MacCarthy, do your duty."

The gamekeeper raised his gun and fired. Colonel Hutchinson fell dead. The sight of his dead body struck them with panic, and they hastily left the house, taking nothing with them. Malachi Duggan gave the names of all the men who had been with him. The magistrates and gentry immediately began a strict search, but the criminals, as soon as it was rumoured that Malachi had turned Informer, took to the hills and concealed themselves—all the country people of course assisting and aiding them. The county of Cork was at that period under martial law, and the Cork yeomanry were a formidable body. They were determined that the murderers of Colonel Hutchinson should not escape, and they hunted down all the peasants suspected of giving them shelter. One day they were on the track of some of the murderers; but the inhabitants of a mountain hamlet had aided their escape. Prompt measures were taken on the spot. The cabins were searched; every article of fur-

niture was dragged out, piled in a heap, and then set on fire; the wretched owners standing round, not daring to say a word. One of the soldiers, separated from the ranks, searching an outhouse, found a feather-bed carefully concealed. He was dragging this poor bed to share the fate of the rest, when the captain, a man of humanity, cried out:

"No, gentlemen; these wretched people have suffered enough: let us leave them at least this bed."

As he spoke, a ball whizzed past, grazing his ear. Turning round, a puff of white smoke was seen over the brow of a hill behind them. Immediately, he and two other gentlemen galloped to the spot, feeling sure they had come upon the criminals. They, however, found only two peasants, who had no connexion with Duggan or his gang. They belonged to the village, and, exasperated at seeing the destruction of their goods, had fired the shot. They were immediately seized, and dragged to the prison of Macroom. They were tried, not for firing on the yeomanry, but for helping and hiding the murderers, and they were condemned to be transported. Their trial and sentence made a great sensation. When they were on board the hulks, all their relations and friends came in a body to the court-house, and offered, if these two men were restored to their families, that the whole country should join to hunt down the murderers and give them up to justice. After some consideration this offer was accepted.

The men were pardoned, sent back to their homes, and the people of the county began to keep their word. The murderers now led the lives of hunted wolves, and endured fearful hardships. Winter was approaching, and they did not dare to enter a cabin; every one was against them. Two contrived to escape to America; but the others wandered about amongst the mountains of Glenesk, hiding under rocks, not daring to kindle a fire. At length the people pretended to become friendly to them: some villagers invited them to come to a supper in a barn, where they declared they would be safe. The men, more than half-famished, came down from the mountains, but refused to enter any building, lest they should be surprised; they sat down on the ground and began to eat voraciously. The peasants fell upon them, disarmed them, and gave them up to justice. The trial came on. Malachi Duggan swore to them all, gave a circumstantial account of the murder, and seemed utterly callous to his own infamy. One of the men was his own cousin, named John Duggan, a stonemason. This man was not destitute of the family cunning; he declared that Colonel Hutchinson had not been shot at all; that if the body could be seen, it would be found that the wound had been made by a sharp instrument, and that the end of his chisel would fit the wound; therefore, all that Malachi swore about discharging the gun was a lie. This circumstantial statement rather shook the jury.

The body was disinterred and examined. Three bullets and a brace of slugs were found behind the heart. This at once settled the matter. The prisoners were all sentenced to be hanged, and their heads to be exposed on spikes round the market-house—MacCarthy, the game-keeper, as the man who fired the shot, was to have his hand struck off and affixed above his head.

The prisoners were to be executed at Macroom, and they were conveyed from Cork in an open cart: the hangman—a hideous person—clothed for the occasion in bright green, with a belt on which was printed, in large letters, “Erin go Bragh”—to show what Erin go Bragh principles led to.

The priests were removed from the criminals when they had performed about half the journey, in order that the people, seeing them die without the consolation of religion, might be struck with greater awe. One of the criminals was quite a young boy, cousin to the gamekeeper. He protested he was innocent, and that the worst thing he had ever done was stealing some hens’ eggs from his mother. It was the general impression that he *was* innocent, but that Duggan had sworn against him, in order not to leave one of the family alive, who might take revenge upon him. When the cart and the wretched men arrived at a grove of trees at the entrance of Macroom, they were halted. A beam was laid between two trees, and two of the men were hanged, one at each end: their companions looking on, and the people standing by in silence. When all had suffered, the hangman proceeded to carry out the remainder of the sentence, though even his callous feelings revolted against it, and he required copious draughts of whisky to carry him through it. The sight of eight heads struck a great deal more terror into the people than the execution.

As for Malachi Duggan, the captain of the gang, and treacherous informer, he received the three hundred pounds promised, and returned to his farm. The neighbouring gentry endeavoured to countenance him, but he was quite brutalised, and had no feelings of shame. The first day on which he appeared in Macroom, he looked up to the heads and said, “Ho! ho! some of my soldiers are up there, set in array. It is the best place for the rascals.”

He survived the trial many years, and died in his bed at last; but his memory is held, even yet, in the deepest execration, in that part of the country. Of this there was a curious instance not more than twelve or fourteen years ago. A gentleman living in the neighbourhood, some distance from Cork, had several servants. One of them was a very nice young girl, named Duggan, a far-away cousin of the horrible Malachi. There was a dispute about some trifling matter, and one of the other servants said to Duggan, “We shall really, miss, be obliged to call you Malachi.” The poor girl did not answer a word, but that very evening left her place and set off to walk home to Cork, a distance of five-and-

twenty miles, so disgraceful was the imputation of belonging ever remotely to the treacherous informer.

TALISMANS AND AMULETS.

TALISMANS have been made familiar to most English readers through the Arabian Nights. By the occult virtue of these mysterious charms, you may keep a Genie corked up for ages in a brass casket, or carry him about with you in a ring, or bind him to your service in any enterprise on which you may think fit to embark. All Oriental races have a great notion of the power thus acquired, and the belief lasts to this day among the nations of Asia. But the superstition has prevailed in the West also, and it is hardly extinct among ourselves even at the present moment. The cramp-bone which old women keep in their pockets as a preservative against muscular spasms—the horse-shoe which agriculturists nail over the doors of houses and barns, to keep out the devil—the child’s caul which some suppose will save them from shipwreck—the coin with a hole in it which is thought to bring luck—these are all versions of the ancient idea of talismans and amulets; and so are the relics of saints, consecrated Agnus Deis, crosses, &c., of the Roman Catholics. Like other absurdities of misdirected faith, the belief has at length fallen (at least in Europe) to a mere extravagance of the vulgar and ignorant; but at one time it was reckoned among the most abstruse speculations of the learned; and many books have been written to expound the mystery to uninitiated minds.

A talisman, according to the definition given by the author of an old book called *The Talismans Justified*, is the seal, figure, character, or image, of a celestial sign, constellation, or planet, engraved on a sympathetic stone, or on a metal correspondent to the star, in a time convenient for receiving the influences of that star. Thus, the figure of a scorpion, made under the sign Scorpio, secures the possessor from the bite of that animal. The similitude of Venus, engraved on the first face of Libra, Pisces, or Taurus, imparts joy, beauty, and strength of body, to the lucky owner. Honours and dignities may be easily won by him who carries about his person an image of Jupiter with the head of a ram, on silver, or on a white stone. To be successful in merchandise or in gambling (a very invidious linking together of two different pursuits), you must have a figure on silver of Mercury: perhaps, because he was the God of thieves. If you wish to be brave and victorious, engrave the effigy of Mars on the first face of Scorpio: highly recommended to Volunteers. And to procure the favour of kings—which is certainly a difficult matter without some help—you have nothing to do but to represent the sun in the likeness of a king sitting on a throne, with a lion at his side; taking care to make the engraving on very fine gold on the first face of Leo. By these simple means, it is wonderful how much a man may do for himself, without ability,

industry, or character, or any assistance from rich and powerful friends!

The origin of many of the traditions concerning amulets and talismans is to be found in the Cabala of the Jews. The Hebrew doctors affirm that Moses performed his miracles in Egypt by virtue of a talismanic power inherent in his rod, which, they say, was made on the evening of the Sixth Day of the Creation, and on which was wonderfully engraved the most venerable name of the Deity, Tetragrammaton. The miracles were marked on this rod, together with God's most holy name. According to some authorities, Moses found the wand in Jethro's garden, while returning thanks for his deliverance out of prison, into which he had been cast by his father-in-law.

It is not very easy to distinguish between talismans and amulets; but the former seem to have possessed more important and awful virtues than the latter. Amulets appear to have been always worn about the person, for the sake of warding off some evil. The very word is derived, through the Latin, from the Arabic *hamalet*, something suspended, because these charms were hung on various parts of the body. The ancient Egyptians often wore them in the form of necklaces. The phylacteries of the Jews—slips of parchment on which passages of the Law were written, and which they bound about the forehead or on the left arm—came in time to be regarded as a species of amulets, possessing a sovereign virtue against evil spirits; though there can be no doubt that they were originally worn merely as an ostentatious exhibition of piety. For a similar reason, subsequently degenerating into a magical rite, the Mahometans have at all times been fond of carrying about with them short sentences from the Koran, enclosed in small silver boxes; and the priests of Morocco sell these precious scraps to the negroes of Africa, who call them Fetishes. The early Christians fell so readily into the prevailing superstition, that the practice was solemnly condemned by the Church; and the clergy were interdicted, on pain of deprivation of holy orders, from making and selling charms. The Gnostics—who were, perhaps, the greatest professors of mysticism ever known—found surpassing virtues in particular stones and gems; especially in those which were called Abraxas, from having that word engraved on them. The word is supposed to be barbarously compounded of the Greek letters forming the number 365, and to have signified the Supreme Deity, who was said by those heretics to preside over three hundred and sixty-five other Deities, the spirits of as many worlds, corresponding to the number of days in the year. Many Abraxas stones are still to be found in the cabinets of the curious. Some appear to have come from Egypt, and to belong to the third century; others are suspected to have been made during the middle ages in Spain, where the doctrines of the Gnostics were carried by the Priscillianists; and the Alchemists are thought to have manufactured similar gems to aid them in their pursuit of occult knowledge.

These stones are not merely engraved with the mysterious word Abraxas, but with the ineffable name Jehovah, and with figures of Isis sitting on a lotos, Apis surrounded with stars, monstrous combinations of divers animals, and other figures. The characters are generally Greek, but sometimes Hebrew, Coptic, or Etrurian; occasionally, also, they are of an utterly indescribable and mongrel kind, of which the sense cannot even be guessed.

Similar to the Abraxas charm is that called Abracadabra. The word is said to be Persian, and to be the equivalent of Mithra, the Sun-god. According to the directions of Serenus Sammonicus, you are to write the letters several times over on a piece of paper, in such a manner as to form a triangle which may be read more than one way. The paper must then be folded so as to conceal the writing; stitched into the shape of a cross with white thread; worn in the bosom for nine days, suspended by a linen ribbon; and finally thrown in dead silence, before sunrise, into a stream that flows eastward. It must be flung backward over the shoulder; and you must on no account open and read it, "or all the charm is fled." If, however, you observe all the required conditions, you need never suffer long from a fever, or from a quartan or semi-tertian ague. The Abracadabra is a certain cure.

The Romans were great wearers of talismans and amulets, which sometimes, as Pliny relates, took the form of little vessels cut out of amber. In the middle ages, the coins attributed to St. Helena, the mother of Constantine, were regarded with extreme veneration; and only the other day—viz. in the year 1858—a set of charms was advertised for sale, including some pieces of the Atlantic cable.

The ancient Jews thought highly of charmed rings; and Jerusalem is described in the Bible as decking herself with the earrings of Baalim. Petronius Arbitrator, in his profligate romance, speaks of one of his characters—an old libertine, named Trimalchio—wearing a ring of gold set with stars of steel, which the commentators seem to regard as a species of talisman, because the Samothracians made rings of this sort with a view to their being used as charms. Rings have at all times and in all countries been looked upon as possessing a mystical character. A circle is the most simple of forms; yet it is the symbol of Eternity. Perhaps it is on this account that rings have been held in peculiar solemnity. At any rate, there are more marvellous stories about rings than about any other article of personal adornment. The Slave of the Ring in the Arabian story of Aladdin, will at once occur to the reader's mind. Solomon, amongst his other titles, was "Lord of the magic ring." Then we have the old Greek legend of Gyges; the rings of Excestus, the Phocensian tyrant, which by a peculiar noise advised him of the progress of his affairs; the ring of Eleazar the Jew, which, as Josephus reports, dispossessed several demoniacs in the presence of the Emperor Vespasian; the seven rings of Jarcha,

an Indian prince, presented by him to Apollonius of Tyana, who, at the age of a hundred, was restored by their virtue to the freshness and strength of thirty; a fortune-telling ring, mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus, which was consulted to reveal who should succeed the Emperor Valens (as we now consult our Planchettes); and a ring commemorated by Petrarch, which was found in the mouth of a dead woman with whom Charlemagne was desperately in love. It was the quality of some of the talismanic rings of the Arabians, not merely to preserve the wearers from poison, to cure diseases, and to drive away evil spirits, but to make all whom the owners desired to affect in that way, passionately enamoured of them. With the early Egyptians, talismans were more frequently fashioned in the shape of gods, men, and animals, than in that of rings. Sometimes these figures were carved on plants, branches of trees, or roots. Stones wrought into the shape of beetles were thought to be very effectual in procuring strength and courage; because, says *Ælian*, this animal has no female, and is an image of the sun. Frogs, represented in the same way, were also held in great repute; which gave Pliny occasion to remark that, if we are to believe such traditions, "a parcel of frogs ought to be esteemed more significant in a commonwealth than a body of laws." An old historian relates that a philosopher put a stop to a plague at Antioch, by a stone which had engraved on it a head of Charon. Apollonius made use of the figures of storks and serpents. Gregory of Tours relates that the city of Paris was for some ages preserved from fire and other calamities by a serpent and a mouse of brass; but that a little before the conflagration of the year 588 these talismans were unfortunately dug up from under the arch of a bridge. In like manner, Virgilius the Enchanter, according to the old story books, preserved Rome from rebellion, by statues of armed knights, and Naples from flies and leeches by figures of those creatures in brass and gold; and thus was Constantinople protected from storks by a magical effigy of that bird, from plague by the image of a knight, and from snakes by a brazen serpent. When Mahomet II. took the capital of the Eastern empire, say some gossiping historians, he broke the teeth of this metal serpent: whereupon, a prodigious number of snakes made their appearance in the city; but, luckily for the people, they all had their teeth broken, like the figure of the guardian serpent which the Turk had so foolishly misused.*

Not in itself a talisman, yet acquiring something of a talismanic character, was that wedding-ring which a certain young nobleman of Rome, newly married, placed one day on the outstretched finger of a brazen statue of Venus, while he was playing at ball in his garden, together with his friends. The story is related by William of Malmesbury in his *Chronicle of the Kings of*

England (book ii. ch. xiii.); and the incidents are briefly as follows:—The young nobleman, having completed his game, went to the statue to resume his ring, but found the finger clenched fast in the palm of the hand. His efforts to remove the ring or to unbend the finger were fruitless; and for a while he gave up the attempt. But, going again in the dead of night, he was astonished to see the finger once more extended, and the ring gone. In utter dismay, he retired to bed, where he was conscious of something dense and cloud-like lying beside him; and at the same time heard a voice, saying, "I am Venus, whom you wedded to-day—on whose finger you put the ring: I have it, and will not restore it." This continued night after night for a long while; and the young nobleman was then advised by the bride's parents to follow the directions of one Palumbus, a priest and sorcerer. This person gave the bridegroom a letter, and told him to go at night into the high road where it divided into four several ways, and to stand there in dumb expectation. A procession of diverse people of both sexes, some on horseback, and some not, would pass by; but with these he was not to exchange a word, even if they should address him. Then would follow the chief of that company, riding in a chariot adorned with emeralds and pearls; to whom the letter was to be delivered in profound silence. The young nobleman went to the spot at the prescribed time, and the procession moved past, exactly as had been foretold. At last came the chief, who, looking sternly on the intruder, demanded the occasion of his visit. He, stretching out his hand in dead silence, gave the necromancer's letter to the demon, who read it through, and, lifting his eyes to heaven, solemnly asked how long the crimes of the priest Palumbus were to be permitted to endure! The devil then sent one of his attendants to take the ring by force from Venus, who parted from it with great reluctance. Thus were matters set right, as far as the young nobleman was concerned; but Palumbus, on hearing what the demon had said about him, concluded that his time was come. Accordingly, he made atonement by cutting off all his limbs, having previously confessed incredible iniquities in the presence of the Pope and the Roman people.

The ghastliest talisman on record is "The Hand of Glory," or dead man's candle, at one time thought to be used by burglars. The hand must be that of a murderer hung in chains. It must be the right hand,—that is to say, the hand that has done the deed. After blanching it in the sun, with many mystical ceremonies, the candle is to be placed within the white and marrowless fingers. This candle is to be composed mainly of the fat of a murderer scooped from under a wayside gibbet; and the wick is to be made from the dead criminal's hair. According to the old tradition, the light of this awful candle has such an effect on those who see it that they are unable to move or cry out; so that he who holds it may ransack the room at his leisure, and set all resistance at defiance.

* See Collier's Dictionary. Arts.: Rings and Talismans.

What the great Robert Boyle would have said to such a superstition as this, it would be dangerous to guess; but he had a belief in a somewhat similar charm. He relates that he found the moss of a dead man's skull, brought from Ireland, effectual in stopping a bleeding at the nose which nothing else would abate. But for this, there might be a chemical reason. Boyle, however, gives one of a more mechanical kind, trenching on mysticism. The human body being exceedingly porous, the effluvia of the amulet may, he argues, in time find an ingress into the habit, owing to an agreement between the pores of the skin and the figure of the corpuscles. Other learned authors have written to the same effect; but the opinion has long been reckoned among exploded fallacies.

THE DUCHESS VERONICA.

IN EIGHT CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I. FAMINE, PESTILENCE, AND MARRIAGE.

By the united efforts of the Emperor Charles the Fifth, and the Medicean Pope, Clement the Seventh, liberty was finally destroyed, and the despotism of the Medici established in Florence in the year 1531. In the year 1631, Ferdinand the Second, the fifth grand-duke, was reigning in Tuscany; and a hundred years of despotism had done their work on the country according to the immutable laws in such cases appointed and ordained.

At the former epoch there was assuredly much passing among those lovely vine-and-olive-clad hills, and beneath those pure azure skies, which might have made angels weep, if we are to suppose them to look down on the fair earth man has inhabited, and the use he makes of it. There was blood on all the land, in the streets of every fair city, and almost on every smiling hill-side. Liberty died hard and slowly, amid convulsive throes, social confusion, and multi-form violence. There was deadly feud between family and family, and in many cases between fathers and sons. There were crimes, treasons, falsehoods, follies, short-comings innumerable. But there were also some heroisms; and, until hope was finally crushed, there were many noble aspirations. Intellect was awake and was winning some of its noblest triumphs. Even material prosperity, and the creation of wealth, which had risen to so marvellous a height under the old municipal freedom, though sadly injured and hindered by the prevailing disorder and violence, was not smitten with paralysis. For, industry and energy were yet alive; and—as a rich soil cultivated with difficulty amid rocks and tree-stumps will give golden harvests—contrived, despite all impediments, to realise magnificent results.

In the year 1631, every feature of this picture had become changed. The country presented every symptom of moral and material decrepitude. From having occupied the highest rank in Europe in literature, science, and art, Tuscany, and Italy generally, were rapidly sinking to all but the lowest. Vast wealth indeed remained, the pro-

duce, either of former activity and enterprise, or of a legislation craftily contrived by means of monopolies and such like suicidal devices, to gather into a few hands at the expense of general pauperisation. The grand-dukes themselves, especially, had by such means amassed enormous treasures. But wealth thus collected into unproductive masses engenders a social malaria as pestilential as that caused physically by huge bodies of stagnant water, instead of the beneficent and fertilising effect which resembles that of the same element duly distributed and put into motion. Agriculture was neglected; commerce well-nigh annihilated; population was decreasing. But "order" had been established. All was very orderly in Church and State. There were no rebellions and no heresies. No man dreamed of disputing the absolute authority of the government over his body, or of the church over his soul. Not, indeed, that this "order" ensured safety to life and property in the one department, or any tolerably satisfactory state of religious and moral feeling in the other. For, the stiletto of the assassin was rife in the streets and palaces of Florence; and rarely—saving always of course at Rome—has the world seen such utter demoralisation and general dissoluteness combined with profuse religious professions and practices, as prevailed under Medicean rule.

Then there came upon all that festering mass of wickedness, laziness, folly, luxury, misery, prodigality, beggary, ignorance, and general incapacity of all sorts—"visitations of God"—came as surely as comets return in their course; and they were visitations of God as certainly as are marsh-fevers from the fens on the sluggards who will not drain them, and all the other penal and teaching evils, resulting from man's mismanagement of the moral and material elements which the all-wise Creator has destined to furnish his rewards, his punishments, and his education.

Pestilence came, and famine came. And, as we find from the historians, without surprise, all the means which were adopted for the remedy of these evils only seemed to make matters worse. The gathering of masses of the people in processions and in the churches to implore the interposition of the Virgin did not stay the pestilence; and the prohibition of all commercial intercourse or transport of commodities, failed to alleviate the scarcity. But though we may not be astonished at these phenomena, the seventeenth-century Tuscans were so. It was a terrible *disgrazia*; a tremendous indication that the "favour" of Heaven was withdrawn from the land. And every man saw in the general affliction, a castigation due to the sins of his neighbours.

It does not appear to have occurred to many that their own sins had ought to do with the judgment, which all agreed that the general wickedness of the community had brought down upon it. The religious frame of mind indicated by the prevalence of such reflections does not seem to have availed in any degree to effect any improvement in the general morality. On

the contrary, as has always been observed to be the case under similar circumstances, recklessness of living, excesses and irregularities of all kinds, became very manifestly more general and unbridled than ever. The testimony of history to the effect produced on masses of men by any circumstances enhancing in an extraordinary degree the usual uncertainty of life and forcing it on their attention, is unvarying. Permanent danger to life, whether from pestilence, war, or other causes, has, very observably, ever made the reflection "to-morrow we die," lead to the conclusion, "let us eat and drink," rather than to any line of conduct more rationally in accordance with the presumed theories of the minds thus acted on.

The morals, accordingly, of all classes were never at a lower ebb in Florence than at the period which has been spoken of. The plague had raged in the cities of Tuscany in 1630, but in the following year had almost disappeared. In 1633 it broke out again with greater virulence than ever, and brought famine—or at least a near approach to famine—with it in its train. As usual, the "visitation" had fallen most terribly on the poorer classes of the people, thus affording a very edifying proof of what might otherwise not have been imagined:—that the national sins which had occasioned it, must have been in the main the sins of the commonalty. But at the second outbreak, several personages of high position fell victims to it, and great was the consternation produced by so alarming an innovation. The panic became universal, and the prevalent dissoluteness of living coextensive.

It was near noon on a bright day of autumn in this terrible year, 1633, that old Giustino Canacci and his son Bartolommeo came out of a house in the Via dei Pilastri, near the church of Sant' Ambrogio, still noted as the scene of some of the events about to be narrated in the following pages. The old man was in his seventieth year; the young one about twenty-five.

"There they go!" said the senior, after glancing up and down the street; "another house shut up, and the mark on the door since last night. Ah! it's neighbour Faldi this time! Well! well! we are here to-day, and gone to-morrow."

"Not you!" said his son, savagely. "No such luck! You don't look like going to-morrow, nor the day after neither."

"You'll look like it, reprobate that you are, long before you are my age," returned the sire. "A pretty life you are leading, drunk half the day and all the night, and the deaths in the quarter increasing every day!"

"Yes! a proper sort of time in Florence it is, isn't it, for an old scarecrow like you to be thinking of marrying, of all things in the world! With nothing but plague and famine all round one, you must needs want a wife—you! who ought to be in your grave, plague or no plague, before now. Ugh! It's disgusting! You look like a bridegroom, don't you?"

"More like one, I think, than you, my son, at all events," said the old man, scanning with

a look of unconcealed aversion the debauched, discreditable-looking figure and bloated evil countenance of the young man. "But now," he added, "since the pestilence won't take either of us, and it is a pity but what it should clear the house of one of us, do you go about your business, which is to gamble with some rake-hell or other at the Garden* there, till you are too drunk to hold your cards, and let me go about mine."

"Mine is an honest business than what you are going after, any way, you old wretch! May the murrain take you as you pass through the streets!" said Bartolommeo Canacci, as he turned and slouched away towards the tavern, while his father commenced his walk in the opposite direction.

It was perfectly true, that old Giustino Canacci was bent on the preposterous step of taking to himself a second wife, now, while young and old were dying around him, and it might be supposed that marrying and giving in marriage would have found but small place in men's minds. It was true, also, that in one point of view at all events, he looked more fitted to become a bridegroom than his reprobate son. He was a hale and well-preserved man, who carried his seventy years as well as so heavy a load could be borne, while his son Bartolommeo was already old at twenty-five. Beyond this, it would have been difficult to say which of the pair was the less desirable and more unpromising regarded in the character of a suitor. The countenance of each was villanously bad, each in its own way. There was the same low brow and absence of forehead in both. But in the old man the narrow-pinched temples, and the backward slope of the frontal bone, indicated poverty and meanness of intellect, while the equally low but somewhat protruding and broader forehead of his son imparted a character of ferocity and brutality to the physiognomy. The small and twinkling grey eyes of the senior, set in the centre of a converging spider's net of wrinkles, spoke plainly of low cunning, watchfulness, and suspicion. The dull blood-shot orbs of the junior, under their penthouse of black shaggy brow, gave warning that the haggard lacklustre deadness, which resulted from habitual excess, might at small provocation be changed to active malignity and cruelty. The style of dress of both father and son was as little prepossessing as might be. The old man looked mouldy, threadbare, and faded. The young one tawdry, slovenly, and wine-stained. Shabbiness and dirt were common to both.

Nevertheless, true it was that old Giustino Canacci was going a wooing; going, moreover, in no diffident mood; but with a very tolerable assurance that his suit would be a successful one. For it was, in a word, the old story. The old man had seen an article which he fancied suited him—miserable old fool—and had determined on buying it. Not that Signor Canacci was a wealthy man, far from it; but he was

* A tavern so called, existing at that time in the Via dei Pilastri.

"pauper in *ere suo*;" he had wherewithal to live, and to keep a wife, too, in decent comfort and quite respectable idleness. The house from which he had just issued with that amiable son of his was his own, and was a something more than decent and respectable home. And then the times! Amid the universal distress, and misery, and precariousness, money was money, even ever so little of it; and a home was a home, even though shared with such a partner as Signor Canacci. The matrimonial market, like every other market, was dreadfully depressed. Who thought of marrying in those days of terror? Why, there were girls in every street, very eligible ones too, orphans without the assurance of bread to eat or roof-tree to cover them for four-and-twenty hours to come; and more dreading to become so with every returning morning, and looking into the black hopeless future with despairing eyes. How many fathers of well-conditioned families, reduced to ruin by the hardness of the times and the stagnation of all business, looking, too, to the probability from day to day of leaving an unprotected daughter adrift upon the distracted world of that miserable, reckless, and disorganised society, would jump at the chance of securing for them the snug and safe, though modest competence, assured to the mistress of Casa Canacci! "Yes, yes!" thought old Giustino to himself, "if the times are good for nothing else, they are good for finding a wife. Not much danger of a refusal of a good home now-a-days!"

Pleasing himself with these reflections, the old man went on his errand, walking firmly and uprightly through the streets, now beginning to have some stir and movement in them as the hour of noon drew near.

Taking his way towards the Arno, he passed across the large open square in front of the church of Santa Croce. There, in one of the houses forming the side of the square opposite to the west front of the church, was situated one of those places for the gratuitous distribution of food, which had recently been established in various parts of the city by the young grand-duke, then in his twenty-third year, as a measure of relief to his starving subjects. The attempt was well intended; but, carried into effect with the rude simplicity and ignorance characteristic of the time and people, it was not only as inefficient for good as those other provisions against pestilence and famine which have been alluded to, but, like them, was productive of very serious increase of the calamities it was meant to alleviate. A modicum of the coarsest and cheapest food was given to any applicant. Those who are not really pressed by want, thought the prince and his counsellors, will not seek so uninviting a meal. A modern relieving officer would have known better. All those who previously had, by dint of striving, succeeded in obtaining wherewithal to keep body and soul together, found it more agreeable to do this at the duke's cost than by their own exertions. And, of course, increased pauperisation rapidly followed the establishment of the grand-

ducal relieving kitchens. It followed, moreover, from the simplicity of the plan of giving the food to the first comer, that those who were least entitled to relief were by far the most sure of obtaining it. The stout pair of shoulders, that might have earned a bit of bread for their owner, thrust aside the emaciated wretch already half-starved, the aged crone, or fragile girl, who had nought but an alms between them and absolute starvation. And a scene of fighting, screaming, pushing, despairing, cursing, was daily reproduced in front of the distribution places, which added a characteristic feature to the other painful and disorderly sights and sounds that made the streets of Florence horrible.

The hour of noon struck as Signor Giustino was passing by that end of the large piazza. It was the time at which the distribution began. And immediately as the hour was struck from the neighbouring tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, the crowd, which had for an hour or more been collected in front of the door, began to sway and undulate as if shaken by a tempest wind. Every voice was raised. The men cursed and pushed, the women screamed and scratched. There was small hope for the most helpless and hopeless among them. Yet the first served at the hatch-door that day was a woman evidently half starved and old. With desperate tenacity the miserable creature had clung on by a huge iron ring on the door, and had so, despite buffetings and imprecations, succeeded in keeping the place she had secured by being the earliest comer hours ago in the morning. Having received her dole, which she forthwith enveloped in a portion of the rags which hung about her to secure it from the greedy hands around, she was speedily and roughly hustled out from the throng, and thus reached the outskirts of it, half dead with long fasting, long standing, and struggling. Then appeared the ruling passion which had given the poor creature the force to withstand the buffetings of the crowd and the fatigue of the long struggle. Outside the crowd, on a door-step close to the spot where old Giustino stood amusedly looking on at the throng fighting for life, on the "*saue mari magno*" principle, sat a wan emaciated figure, a girl of some seventeen years, who had been pretty once. To her the victorious mother brought the mess of beans, the produce of her hard fight and long endurance. It was only in a mother that spirit could thus conquer matter in that dire strife, for the starving girl eagerly devoured the entire pittance, while the old woman looked on with eyes in which the wolfish expression of her own extreme animal need was strangely blended with satisfaction at the relief of pangs sharper to her than her own.

Signor Canacci laughed a sardonic laugh as he looked on at the pair.

"Ah!" said he to himself, "now that is just what I should like Caterina to see with her own eyes. Yes, that is what girls no worse off than she may easily come to now-a-days. Better, I think, to be La Signora Canacci, with a good house over one's head, and a decent meal on the

table every day. Yes, yes, Caterina will know on which side her bread is buttered; she will say 'Yes!' fast enough, and 'Thank you, sir!' into the bargain."

Muttering thus to himself the old man continued his way to the Lung'arno, as the street is called which runs along the river bank, forming a magnificent terrace from one end of the city to the other. It is more magnificent now than it was at the date of this narrative. For after having remained much as it was in the seventeenth century till within these two years, it has recently been embellished and widened by new river-walls and parapets and other ameliorations after the fashion of the nineteenth century. But such improvements can rarely be attained in the mediæval cities of Italy, save at the cost of destroying some interesting memorial of the past. And here on the Lung'arno, just where Signor Canacci emerged on it from the narrow streets behind it, the very smart cut-stone front of a specially hideous new Bank and Chamber of Commerce now occupies the spot on which stood, a few months ago, one of the most singular and picturesque structures in Florence. It was a huge dyeing establishment, which had remained unchanged, amid so many changes around it, since the days when the dyed woollens of Florence were celebrated in every part of Europe, and formed one of the principal sources of the vast wealth of the old republic. That industry, like every other, had languished and declined under the grand-dukes; but it was still carried on in this spot, as indeed it was till the dyers were, much against their will, turned out the other day by the genius of modern improvement.

It cannot be said that the old dyeing-house was beautiful, that it bore the slightest resemblance to any order of architecture ever heard of, or that to the eye of any city-surveyor, architect, or sanitary reformer, it was even decent. But it was very strange, very unlike anything else in the nineteenth-century world, and withal singularly picturesque. From vaults below the level of the street four or five huge cavernous mouths opened on the public way, from which dense bodies of vapour were always issuing forth, while bare-armed and strangely-tinted figures might be dimly described around steaming vats in the chiaroscuro of the den within. Piles and acres of newly-dyed goods were heaped around these doorways, or hung out to dry on the opposite parapet-wall, in innocent ignorance of the most rudimentary ideas of street police or the rights of his majesty the Public; but to the great delight of any disciple of Prout in want of a bit of colour. The walls of the building over these vaults reached only to the height of one story. But above that, raised on timbers at the height of about two stories more, and thus covering a vast space of open terrace, was such a roof as never entered into the mind of a modern builder to conceive. There must have been timber enough in it to have furnished forth a dozen 'Prospect-rows,' or "Bellevue-buildings." The huge beams—each a tree from the pine forests of the Apennines—crossed each other in every

possible direction and at every imaginable angle. And high in air was the enormous beetle-browed roof, with its mellow-coloured red tiling, projecting far on all sides beyond the basement of the structure. Then must be imagined all the wondrous play of light and shadow as the rays of an Italian sun darted in and lost themselves among that quaint forest of timbers; and further, the effect of the long pendant draperies of newly and brightly-dyed stuffs hung up here and there among the recesses of the labyrinth of beams; and then it will be understood that the old roof of the dyers was a bit of Florence dear to an artist's heart.

And there it stood unchanged for more than two centuries after Signor Giustino Canacci's visit. Now it is gone, and a prim, more-or-less-Palladian Bank stands in its place.

As Signor Canacci passed along the front of the building, he saw the man he was in search of, sitting listlessly on a little bench at the entrance to one of the vaults which have been described. Each of these was tenanted by a different member of the trade, although the terrace above and the roof were in common to all of them. Time had been when Pasquale* Bassi was a flourishing and well-to-do citizen; but "the times" had well-nigh ruined him, as they had many others. His wife and a son had died recently of the plague. One daughter, Caterina, remained to him. If the pestilence spared him, it seemed that the task of maintaining her and himself in decent respectability would become every day a more difficult one. And if it struck him down, she would be left wholly unprotected and unprovided on the world—and on such a world!

Under these circumstances, it was not strange that the poor dyer, instead of hurrying home to his dinner at noon, sat sadly thinking at the door of his nearly empty and idle workshop.

"Good day, friend Pasquale," said Giustino, as he came up to him; "how goes the world with you this morning?"

"Ah! Messer Giustino! Your servant! Will you walk into my poor place?"

"No, my friend; let us have a little talk here. Fresh air and the sky for ceiling, is better than many a chamber in these days."

"That's true, signore, God knows!" returned the dyer, making room for his visitor on the little bench.

"And how goes business? Nothing to brag of, eh?" said the old man, sitting down.

"Nothing can be worse, Messer Giustino; and yet I suppose it *will* be worse, for we are not starved to death yet!"

"Nay! there is surely less danger of that than usual. There is such a good chance of escaping it by dying of the plague. But it is, I admit, a comfortable thing in these times to depend on no man and no business for one's bed and board."

* The maiden family name of Caterina is not mentioned by the chroniclers. That in the text, therefore, is fictitious. The other names are historical.

"Ay! for my part I wish I was out of it all, one way or other. If it were not for Caterina, I would not cross the street to avoid the murrain."

"My dear friend, don't let the Signora Caterina stand in your way in the matter. Here I am to renew my proposal and receive your answer. I offer Caterina a sure and comfortable home, and a respectable position at my death. Have you made your reflections? Is it to be a match?"

"Of course, *illustrissimo* Signore Giustino, the proposal of such an alliance is too great an honour for our poor house; and most true it is that in such a time it would be an unspeakable comfort to settle my poor motherless girl so unexceptionably. But pardon me if I allude to one circumstance that causes me some misgiving. Il Signore Bartolommeo, your excellent son! Do you think that his residence with so young a mother-in-law would—that is, might, perhaps—"

"Caro mio! what are you dreaming of? Assuredly I should never ask Caterina to live in the house with Bartolommeo. But hark, in your ear. I am tired of living in the house with him myself. Out he goes, and that to-morrow. And after all it will not be much difference to him, for he well-nigh lives at the pothouse as it is. No, no! Put Bartolommeo quite out of the question."

"Honestly, most respected sir, under other circumstances, I might have wished—certainly not a more honourable establishment for my poor Caterina; indeed, we never could have aspired to such an alliance—but, to speak frankly, a husband more of her own time of life. She is not yet sixteen, *la poveretta*!" added the father, with a heavy sigh; "but paying due attention to the just reflections your worship has put before me, I do think that I cannot do better for my poor girl than accept your honourable and flattering proposals."

"Basta! that's settled, then. And now, my poor Pasquale, is it not a comfort to think that you may die in peace of the plague to-morrow, and leave Caterina well provided for?"

"Signore, it *is* a comfort. She is all I have left; and she was always, as your worship knows, the sunbeam in our poor house; as good a girl, Signor Giustino, as ever father and mother had—docile, obedient, gentle, loving, modest, always contented to be at home, never gadding after admiration; and you know, Signor Giustino, whether she has had temptation in that line! A good girl, Signor Canacci, a good girl; and I trust she may make a dutiful wife."

"I doubt it not, my friend! A home-keeping daughter will make a home-keeping wife; and that is what I want. Now I will go straight to Messer Jacopo Buonaccorsi, and tell him to prepare the contract. We won't lose time, for who knows how much we may have of it? When shall I come and have a talk with Caterina?"

"To-night after the Ave Maria, if you will, Ser Giustino."

"Hum! . . . after the Ave Maria? . . . I like to be at home, with my doors well shut

and bolted, after the Ave Maria, friend Pasquale. It's not good walking in the streets after sundown now-a-days in Florence. Suppose we say to-morrow, at this hour?"

"At your pleasure, Signor Giustino. Caterina shall expect you at mid-day to-morrow."

"God have you then in his keeping, my good Pasquale, till this time to-morrow."

"Signor Giustino, I kiss your hands. At this hour to-morrow."

And so the ruined dyer and his proposed son-in-law parted.

As soon as the latter was out of sight, Pasquale Bassi rose slowly from his seat, and walked with downcast eyes and thoughtful brow towards the desolate home in a neighbouring street, where Caterina was expecting his mid-day return from the workshop, to announce to her the destiny that awaited her. But it must not be imagined from the poor dyer's evident heavy-heartedness, that his care was caused by any such feelings as might be supposed to darken the heart of an English nineteenth-century father, about to make a similar communication to his daughter. It was rather the general aspect of the times and his own imminent ruin that caused the Florentine father's melancholy. Few such, probably, in his position would have admitted, even to the extent Pasquale Bassi had in his conversation with Canacci, that a younger bridegroom would have been more desirable than a match with a patrician living in his own house and independently on his own means. The prevailing feelings and ideas with regard to marriage were such, and similar unions were so far from rare, that none of the repugnance was likely to be felt, either by the girl thus sold or by her family, which a similar proposal would excite in a sounder and healthier state of society.

So, when Pasquale Bassi reached the still decent but sadly desolate home, from which two of its inmates had recently been snatched by the pestilence, and much of its material plenishing carried off by the distress arising from it, and found poor Caterina sitting in solitude at the window waiting for him, the news he brought her produced none of the emotion which differently situated and differently bred damsels might have felt. She was sitting disconsolately enough, with her distaff at her shoulder and the spindle between her fingers; but they had forgotten to twirl it. Her head had fallen on her bosom, and her mind was busy with the utter hopelessness of the prospect before and around her.

"Caterina, my child," said the father, "I have had Messer Giustino with me. He came for my answer; and he is to be here at mid-day to-morrow. He has now gone to his lawyer to order the contract to be prepared. My child! my child!" added he, after a long pause, "God grant that it may be well with thee!"

"But, father! that horrible man—that son of his—that Bartolommeo!"

"I spoke of that, my Caterina; and Ser Giustino said that he would no longer live in the house—that he himself could not live with him."

"Ah! that is a great point gained, my dearest

father! That was my greatest dread. With Ser Giustino I shall do very well, doubt it not. He means well; and I will do my duty by him. But I am loth to leave you, my father—all alone here," she added, with a glance round the desolate room, "and in such times, too!"

"I have got it in my head, Caterina mia, that it is I who will leave you before long. And you may guess whether my mind is easier at the thought of leaving you, at least in a safe and honourable home."

"My own darling father! do not talk in that manner. All will yet be well. These dreadful days will pass away, the business will revive, and we shall talk over the bad time of the pestilence often of a winter evening in Casa Canacci."

"So be it, my child!" returned the broken-spirited father, striving to shake off his depression and black presentiments. "So be it, my own Caterina! And now, darling, I must go to our good friend Beppo Fierli, to tell him to see Messer Giustino's lawyer on our part."

And Caterina was again left in complete solitude to meditate on the new life before her.

Thus was definitively settled the marriage of the loveliest girl in Florence—for such all the old chroniclers, who have recorded these facts, agree in declaring her to have been—in her sixteenth year, with a dirty, disagreeable, mean-minded old man, aged enough to be her grandfather. And Heaven was called on to bless the union; and the parties to the monstrous bargain hoped that good would come to them of it; and Caterina went to her new home honestly meaning to "do her duty" by her husband.

CHAPTER II. A FLORENTINE HOME IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

So Messer Giustino Canacci—or *dei Canacci*—for it would seem from some of the chronicles that he was entitled to the "particle noble," which indicated his patrician birth and quality—Messer Giustino *dei Canacci* bought his lovely young wife dirt cheap, in consequence of the hardness of the times, and the depression of the market for that as for other articles. And pretty Caterina Bassi, who, as her father said, with perfect truth, had for sixteen years been as good a girl and dutiful a daughter as parents could wish to have, the stay of their age and the sunshine of their house—pretty innocent Caterina went to her new home very thoughtfully, purposing, as she said, "to do her duty" by her septuagenarian husband.

What precisely was her idea of this duty to be done, it might probably be somewhat difficult to investigate. It, of course, was the result of the teaching, avowed and unavowed, conscious and unconscious, which she had received from the religious theories and the social practices in vogue around her. This much, however, is at all events clear, that according to Nature's view of the matter, poor Caterina might as well have undertaken to do her duty as Emperor of China. What could have been her duty in the matter, unless to every proposition of such marriage to oppose utter and unbending refusal.

"No! It is in flagrant opposition to the supreme law, the clearest, most indubitable, most unchangeable law of God! Ever no! Death rather!" But how could the performance of any such duty as this be expected from a poor little sixteen-year-old subject of Ferdinando de' Medici, and docile daughter of Mother Church? A loveless marriage is a sin against nature, fatal, irremedial, from which no good, but evil only and further sin, can arise—on which no blessing can be hoped—a sin excusable by no conceivable circumstances—justifiable by no plea whatsoever of antagonistic or antecedent obligations. But if, strange as it is, this eternal truth is not invariably recognised, and universally acted on even in enlightened nineteenth-century England, what could be expected from seventeenth-century Catholic Florence! And the worst of it is, that the moral government of this world is like the law that governs a long arithmetical operation. One figure wrong in the top line, and your whole sum comes out hopelessly wrong in every part. Actions *will* produce their proper necessary and ordained consequences. A wrong step, moralists constantly tell us, ever increases the difficulty of stepping aright afterwards. But it is the special penalty attached to some false steps, that they render a perfectly upright walk for the future impossible. An error has come into the calculation. The sum cannot, thenceforward, be worked correctly.

So Caterina went to the decent and respectable old family house of the Canacci, in the Via dei Pilastri, to do her unnatural and impossible duty.

Old Giustino, on his part, seems to have performed the conditions under which he effected his purchase. The brutal drunkard, Bartolommeo, ceased to be an inmate of the house, though his occasional visits continued to be a source of trouble to Caterina; but not more, or perhaps so much so, as to the old man himself. The "safe and assured bed and board" had been duly forthcoming. The mid-day meal and the evening supper followed each other with the most monotonously regular certainty; and there were no anxieties on this score for the morrow. In prospect this had appeared to the ruined artisan's daughter in her naked home, to be well-nigh all that was needed for happiness on earth. The hopes and aspirations of the storm-tossed seaman in imminent danger of wreck, limit themselves to the safety and repose of the harbour. And for a while the security of the asylum she had reached seemed to fill in the fruition of it all the space in her mind which it had occupied when looked forward to from amid the risks and perils of her previous position; the more so that she had found herself able, in one way or another, to afford some assistance to her father.

The dead solitude, too, in which she lived in Casa Canacci, and the strictly home-keeping habits, which fell in with Signor Giustino's ways and wishes, appeared in those early days of her married life to add to the grateful sense of security by shutting out all those miserable

sights and sounds and dangers with which the plague-stricken city was rife.

The only source of interest, moreover, which remained to her outside the doors of her home, was very shortly taken from her. For poor Pasquale Bassi was stricken by the pestilence in the last days of its virulence, and followed, as he said he should, his wife and son to the grave.

Thus Caterina was left alone in the world with her aged husband.

And by the spring of the next year the plague had ceased. The Miserecordia bell was no longer heard booming its sinister call over the city almost every hour of the day and night. Valdarno and its enclosing hills were once more bright and smiling with the promise of abundant corn, wine, and oil. The extreme pressure of scarcity decreased gradually; and the Florentines made haste to forget the black days through which they had passed.

But all this brought no change to the monotonous dreamy life of the inmates of the still old house in the Via dei Pilastri. There the noontide meal and the evening meal still followed each other with imperturbable regularity, and the morning and the evening made up each uneventful day, unvaried save by the Sunday and Feast-day visits to the neighbouring church of Sant' Ambrogio. And Caterina, having left a year behind her the anxieties, the privations, and the labour of her maiden life, was now in her seventeenth year, though somewhat paled, like a flower shut from the sunlight, more beautiful than ever.

But unfailing succession of dinners and suppers, even though the prospect of such be stretched out with unbroken continuity into the future, will not—so perversely constituted is the human heart—suffice to ensure happiness or even placid contentment. Especially they fail to do so to a heart and mind of just seventeen years' experience of life. It was in vain that Caterina, marvelling at the change that was creeping over her, strove to call back her imagination to the days when such tranquil security as that of her present life appeared to her a haven of rest, beyond which she had nothing to ask of fate. In vain she taxed herself with capricious fickleness, and questioned her heart as to the causes of the change. She could not understand it. But the fact was there. An unspeakable weariness seemed to extend itself from day to day, like a spreading dry-rot, over her life. It all seemed empty. There was a feeling of a great craving void in her heart, craving unmistakably; but craving for what? She spent dull idle hours in wearily thinking over the question, and found no answer to it.

Thus much of the story to be told may be authentically gathered out of the chronicles, which have preserved for us this specimen bit, cut out from the life of the seventeenth century. At this point the slide is suddenly withdrawn from the magic lantern; the light is put out; and the house in the Via dei Pilastri, with its inmates, vanish into darkness. The next slide projects on

the magic circumscribed circle of light, a scene some four years later in date. There would be very little difficulty in filling up the chasm between the two periods with very satisfactory assurance of truthfulness. But as the reader can do this for himself quite as well as the writer could do it for him, and as it is intended to present here only what is warranted by the record, the *raree-show* shall reopen with the spring of 1638.

Five years have elapsed since we left Caterina, in her seventeenth year, "doing her duty" to her husband, then in his seventieth. She is now twenty-two and he seventy-five—and the wifely duty has become somewhat simplified. For, five years beyond the three score and ten make deep marks in their passage.

It was the third hour of the night, as the old chronicles have it, reckoning after the Italian manner—not yet abandoned in remote parts of the country—from sundown, which was called "the twenty-four"—the third hour of the night in Casa Canacci, which at that season of the year must have been about ten o'clock. The mistress of the house was in a sitting-room on the ground floor, at the back of it, looking into a very small garden; and was occupied, assisted by a neat and pretty maid-servant, some five or six years older than herself, in preparing a table for supper.

The five years, which had sped Ser Giustino so rapidly onward in his down-hill path, had apparently done little or nothing towards advancing his beautiful wife on her way to the top of it. She was, if anything, more lovely than ever. Something, perhaps, may have been due to the style of her attire, which was strikingly different from what it had been in the first years of her married life. It had then been almost monastic in its unadorned simplicity. Now, without making any pretence to the splendour which was then in vogue among the noble and wealthy, it was entirely modish in fashion, and worn with that provocative grace which is the prerogative of those women only, who, in the envious language of those ungifted with it, "lay themselves out for admiration." Somewhat also of increased charm may have been attributable to a very evident change of mind, and consequent change of manner. The old dull listlessness was gone. The heavy vacant eye had acquired brightness and animation. The languid weary-seeming step had become brisk and alert. All the old passivity and apathetic sense of the emptiness of life had vanished. Something had evidently come into the circle of her life which had given it an interest and zest of some sort. Yet any observer, whose attention had been sharpened by a real interest in the young wife's welfare, would hardly have been satisfied with her manner and bearing. Hers was not the air that speaks of tranquil happiness and well-assured contentment. The bright eye was too brilliant. Was there the fever of excitement in it? The alert step was too alert. Did its move-

ments perchance indicate nervous exaltation? At all events, the ever-beautiful Caterina was greatly changed.

"There goes the hour!" she said to her attendant, as they both were busying themselves about the table. "What o'clock was it, Nina, when you gave the padrone his broth?"

"Oh! more than an hour ago," replied the pretty Abigail; "I gave it him nearly half an hour before the time, to make sure. He never keeps awake long after taking it."

"It was well thought of. But, Nina, run up and see if he is asleep. You can tread so that a condemned man listening for the step of the bargello to take him to the block would not hear you. Creep to the bedside, and see that he is really asleep."

"That I can do, signora! But, Holy Virgin! how you trouble yourself about nothing. As if anything could be heard from this room to the room up-stairs looking to the street, and the roof over us a solid arch, too!"

"From this room, perhaps not; but I am afraid of the front door, just under his windows. I would not that he should be disturbed! . . . Run up, Nina, there's a good girl!"

"Disturb him! Oh! not for the world!" said Nina, with half a tone of sneer in her voice, as she glanced with a look of intelligence to her mistress, from whom it obtained no response. And she tripped off on her errand as she spoke.

Caterina, who seemed unable to remain still for a moment, turned to a glass that stood above a console-table at one side of the room, as soon as the maid was gone, and employed herself in bestowing some of those little improving touches on her hair and dress, which women appear never to consider superfluous.

"All right, signora!" cried Nina, with a toss of her pretty head, as she returned to the supper-room; "he is sleeping like a baby in a cradle, and there is no need to think about him any more till to-morrow morning, thank the saints!"

"That is well," said the young wife; but she gave a little sigh as she said it. Then, as she moved round the table for the hundredth time, she went on: "But what is this, Nina mia? These are the second-best napkins. I wanted to have the Holland damask to-night."

"I am sure those are good enough for their highnesses," said Nina; "and they are what you have always used, signora."

"Ah! But, Nina, I expect a different sort of guest to-night—you know who. And don't you know that he must always have been used to much richer plenishing than anything I can put before him? Run, quick, and get out the damask napkins."

Just as she said this, three gentle but distinct taps on the glass of a window by the side of the front door of the house were heard. Both women gave a little start, and the blood mantled high in Caterina's cheeks and forehead, and then as suddenly retreated to her heart.

"There they are!" cried Nina, hastily going with cat-like pace to the door, and taking as she went an oil-cruise in her hand, which stood on a

sideboard near the door of the room. Before opening she poured a drop or two on both hinges of the great door and on the lock, and was thus enabled to admit those who had knocked without the slightest noise.

They were two young men, patricians evidently, by the rapiers at their sides, but not, as far as could be judged by their appearance, of those who formed the gay and youthful circle that surrounded the young grand-duke. One was Signor Jacopo Serselli, and the other Signor Vincenzo Carlini.

Both were, at the period of their visit to Caterina, young men of some twenty-five years old, or thereaway.

As they came in, followed by Nina, with the oil-cruise in her hand, Caterina was again standing before the glass on the console.

"What a treasure you have in our friend little Nina here, Signora Caterina!" said Serselli, as he stepped up to the lady, and kissed her hand. "A lout of a serving-man would have taken the key to open the door. La Nina understands matters better. She takes the oil-flask!"

"And talking of that, lady fair," said Carlini, in his turn kissing the lady's hand, "how is his worship? He sleeps well o' nights, I hope?"

"Better than you will, I doubt, scapegrace as you are, if you ever come to be his age, which is hardly to be thought," said Caterina smilingly, shaking a slender rosey forefinger at him. "Ser Giustino has no remembrances that should keep him from sleeping."

"Oh, of course not! One understands all that. Youth is a new invention of the fiend. There were no young men, and specially no young women, in Ser Giustino's day. And when we have played out our playtime, we shall shake our frosty old heads at the youngsters, and wonder at the wickedness of the age. But sound sleeping is a most valuable quality in an old man, and specially in an old husband, as some think. And then, as Serselli says, Nina is such a treasure!—an invaluable nurse! If the unblemished conscience of the admirable Ser Giustino should fail to procure him that profound repose, which is so necessary at his time of life—to all parties concerned—Nina could at need show herself mistress of higher flights than that trick of oiling a rusty hinge, or I am mistaken."

"What on earth do you mean, Signor Vincenzo?" said Caterina, really puzzled; "and how do you know anything about La Nina's capabilities?"

"Aha! carissima Signora mia!" returned Carlini; "perhaps I knew La Baffi before you did."

A transient cloud passed over the still girlish brow of the young wife, corresponding to an equally transient shade of doubt in her mind, which had not time, however, to assume the full consistency of suspicion before it was chased by the stronger interest that was occupying her thoughts.

For some time past, as may easily be gathered from the facts with which the reader has become

acquainted, La Signora Canacci had entered on a manner of life, which, to say the least, might have been deemed dangerous, and which necessitated the practice of deception on her husband. But as yet the extent of her departure from the good resolutions, with which she had started on her path of married life, had not exceeded this entertaining of cavaliers, without her husband's knowledge. Nor, although abundance of what most of the Florentine beauties, her contemporaries, might have called "temptation," had been thrown in her path, had she hitherto been visited by any feeling calculated to lead her into more serious dereliction of her duty. But the Carnival, that season which seems carefully to have been arranged for the purpose of providing occasion for lenient penitence, was just over; and in the course of those festivities and amusements, which still in some measure, but in the days of which we are speaking to a much greater degree, brought the different classes of Florentine society together, Caterina had more than once dined with perhaps the most "dangerous" man in Florence, the splendid and handsome Jacopo Salviati, Duke of San Giuliano.

The pleasure-seeking duke had been at once smitten with the truly surpassing beauty of Caterina, and had of course found little difficulty in obtaining the promise of a presentation to her from some one of those who were in the habit of frequenting her house.

This presentation was to take place on the evening of which we have been speaking; and Salviati was to make his first visit to the house in the Via dei Pilastri.

"What was the hour you named to the duke, Ser Vincenzo, as that of our little supper?" asked Caterina.

"Half-past ten, French time, I told him," replied Carlini; "and you may depend on Salviati's gallantry to bring him to your door punctually at that hour. And now, by your leave, fair lady, I will go to the door, and wait for his excellency, that there may be no mistake about the house, and no noise about letting him in."

Signor Carlini had not to do duty as porter at the door very long. The Duke of Salviati was, as his friend had prophesied, as punctual to his appointment as ever languishing lover was. Caterina and Signor Serselli had been left together but a very few minutes when Carlini returned, ushering into the modestly-appointed supper-room, with every manifestation of the most exaggerated obsequiousness, a very splendid-looking cavalier.

The age, to which this history belongs, was one specially marked by gorgeousness of personal adornment and equipment. In no part of Europe was extravagance in this respect carried to a greater height, than in the capital of the wealthy and ostentatiously magnificent Medicean dukes. And at the court of the young and pleasure-loving Ferdinand the Second, there was no man who could vie in nobility of birth, in wealth, in personal advantages, and in magnificence, with

Jacopo Salviati, Duke of San Giuliano. A favourite with the young sovereign, whose senior he was by but a year or two, he was the soul of the court, the leading spirit in every revel, the model on which the rising generation strove to form themselves, and the loadstar of most of the brightest eyes in Florence.

Salviati, when duly presented to Caterina, accosted her as he would have done the noblest lady of the court. Far from falling in with that free-and-easy, half mock-ceremonious, half-bantering tone, which Serselli and Carlini permitted themselves towards her, his manner was courtly and respectful, though it made no attempt whatever to hide his very unmistakable admiration for his beautiful hostess. During supper he exerted himself to shine before her. The little party remained at table far into the night. And Caterina thought that she had never till now known the pleasure of social intercourse, or seen a man really worthy of a woman's love.

From that night Jacopo Salviati became a very frequent visitor at the quiet respectable house in the Via dei Pilastri. The ladies of the court complained that Salviati was not like himself of late; he was quite a changed man. And, in truth, he was so—as far as an engrossing passion can change a man.

Caterina, too, was a changed woman. The old feeling of the utter emptiness of all things returned, with the difference that it was confined to the hours when Salviati was not there. All the interest and vitality of her life were concentrated into the hours of his almost nightly visits. She loved for the first time; and now for the first time her marriage with Ser Giustino, and more still, the consequence of her recent life, seemed monstrous; and she marvelled in all sincerity how such things had been possible to her.

And as the summer drew on, and the duke was less frequently obliged to show himself at court, it was rarely that he did not tap at the now well-known window at the usual hour. But these nightly visits were made with every precaution for securing secrecy that could be imagined. Ser Giustino, under Nina's careful nursing, always slept with admirable regularity; and the lovers dared to think that they were happy in each other's love.

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